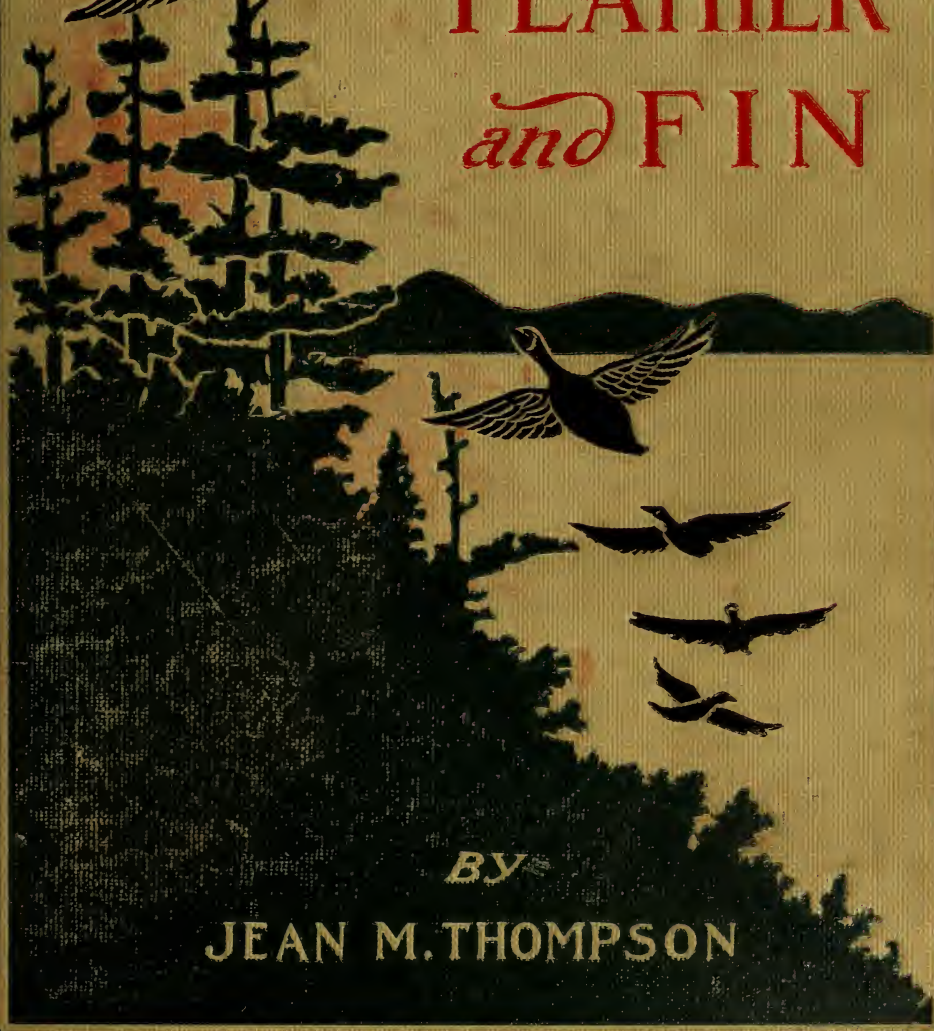


WILD KINDRED
of FUR
FEATHER
and FIN



BY
JEAN M. THOMPSON





THEY WERE SO CUNNING, SUCH PLAYFUL LITTLE THINGS.



WILD KINDRED OF FUR, FEATHER AND FIN

By

JEAN M. THOMPSON

AUTHOR OF

WATER WONDERS,
THE THREE BEARS OF
PORCUPINE RIDGE ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES COPELAND

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Dedicated to
Abbie L. Hubbard

CONTENTS



I.	WHITE CLAW, GLUTTON OF THE WOODS .	13
II.	HOW LHOKS WENT BACK TO THE FOREST	29
III.	THE TRIALS OF PETER POSSUM	43
IV.	THE MINNOW TWINS	55
V.	HOW PORCUPINE RIDGE WAS SETTLED .	69
VI.	METHUSALEH, THE TYRANT OF BLACK POND	83
VII.	MAHUG, THE CHAMPION DIVER	97
VIII.	FIERCE STAR NOSE, THE BURROWER .	109
IX.	THE LOYALTY OF SILVER WING, THE GULL	121
X.	HOW KOS-KO-MENOS, THE KINGFISHER, WON HIS BELT	135
XI.	THE WIT OF CLOWN-FACE, THE BADGER .	149
XII.	THE SUGAR CAMP ON LONE MOUNTAIN .	163
XIII.	THE PERIL OF THE SNOWY EGRETS . . .	179
XIV.	MOGUL, LAST BUFFALO OF THE HERD .	193
XV.	THE LAST PANTHER ON CUSHMAN RANGE	207
XVI.	HOW AHMEEK SAVED HIS GRANDFATHER .	221
XVII.	REDBRUSH AND THE THANKSGIVING TURKEYS	235

XVIII.	THE ESCAPE OF KEEBUCKH, THE COASTER	249
XIX.	HOW MRS. GREEN-FROG SAVED HER FAMILY	263
XX.	THE ADVENTURE OF TOMMY SILVERSIDES	273
XXI.	SPECKLY OF THE WATERWAYS	287
XXII.	THE TAMING OF BOB WHITE	299
XXIII.	TRAPPED ON EAGLE LEDGE	313
XXIV.	HOW SILVER BRUSH SAVED HIS PELT	329



ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
THEY WERE SO CUNNING, SUCH PLAYFUL LITTLE THINGS <i>Frontispiece</i>	331 ✓
THE WOLVERENE HALTED, SHOWING ALL HIS SHARP WHITE TEETH, AND GROWLED HATEFULLY AT THE RACCOON	16 ✓
THE BUFFALO LOWERED HIS SHAGGY HEAD, LUNGED STRAIGHT FOR THE UNPROTECTED STOMACH OF THE BEAR	200 ✓
ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY WOULD SLIDE DOWN AS FAST AS THEY COULD GO	258 ✓



WHITE CLAW GLUTTON OF
THE WOODS

I

WHITE CLAW, GLUTTON OF THE WOODS

JACK FROST comes early up in the North country. By September the face of the mountain changes; between the thickets of dark balsam and spruce, the maples blaze blood-red and golden. All the wild things which intend to hibernate are laying in their winter stores and growing plump with good feeding; they are making ready for their long sleep. Silver Coat, the squirrel, and all his tribe are frantically putting away provisions; the bitter-sweet acorns loosened by the frost are falling from their cups.

Lotor, the old racoon, cut his naps short these days. Even before twilight he now slid down from his pine tree nest, and the very first spot he hurried to visit was a certain wild grape-vine which trailed its snaky branches over the tops of a thickêt of hemlocks, in a secret spot in the heart of a dense wood. It was a lucky day for him, so thought Lotor, when he chanced to dis-

cover the grape-vine, marking the spot for his own. In fact, so elated was Lotor over his find that he could barely spend time to take his all day naps; even in his dreams he thought about the luscious grapes and growled in his sleep over imaginary rivals, fearing some one else should find the grapes and eat them while he slept. Always when he arrived at the wild grape arbor he would hitch himself up hastily into the concealing vines, lest some other creature should be watching his movements.

One evening he went early to the vines, and was soon feasting joyously upon the great, black luscious grapes, which happened to be the very juicy sort; soon the racoon's round, furry face, and his little eager, black paws were all spattered with the rich purple juice of the grapes. Lotor was enjoying himself so keenly that he quite forgot to move about from limb to limb with his usual silence. Instead, he clawed in and out among the vines noisily in his haste to reach another spot where he saw other branches laden down with the luscious, black clusters. Down showered a mass of overripe grapes, pattering far below upon the mossy carpet of the woods. Thus it happened that White Claw, Glutton of the Woods, who was passing by,

looked up curiously into the trees to find out where the showering grapes came from, and having satisfied himself, without even waiting a second, began to climb hastily into the nearest tree.

Now if there was one creature of the forest from whom Lotor the racoon wished to keep his secret, it was none other than the greedy wolverene, nicknamed White Claw, Glutton of the Woods. White Claw was almost as large as his cousin, the little black bear. His tribe were now few and widely scattered, which was perhaps a good thing for all the other denizens of the forest, because the wolverene is such a terrific glutton that wherever he happens to roam, he is sure to devour everything eatable along his trail. So fearfully determined and persistent is he when in pursuit of a meal that he is a terror to most dwellers of the woods.

Full of sly craftiness is the wolverene. An Indian tale is told of one of his tribe who longed for deer meat. This wolverene knew that deer are fond of a certain kind of moss. So, selecting a spot where the deer came to drink, the wolverene strewed little heaps of this particular moss along their trail. Then he climbed a tree, lying out upon a low limb with

flattened body, and waited. When the deer came to feed upon the moss, then the sly fellow dropped down like a shot upon an unsuspecting deer. Oh, White Claw had many crafty tricks at his command. But now he was after grapes. The racoon saw him plainly enough and watched him with fascinated eyes. Of a brownish black was the heavy coat of the wolverene, which showed plainly enough through the tangle of vines. His blunt snout bore a lighter streak of brown fur running back to his neck, but strangest of all were the jet black feet of the wolverene, while the sharp, cruel-looking claws which he dug deeply into the bark of the tree as he climbed were white and gleaming. This peculiarity served well to mark him, setting him apart from all other wild things of the trails, and well enough Lotor the racoon knew the instant he spied those white claws with whom he had to deal.

Having reached a broad crotch in the hemlock, the wolverene could go no further, because just ahead of him in his very path perched a great soft mass of gray fur. So the wolverene halted, showing all his sharp white teeth, and growled hatefully at the racoon. Then, steadily, never taking his fascinated green eyes from the



THE WOLVERENE HALTED, SHOWING ALL HIS SHARP WHITE
TEETH, AND GROWLED HATEFULLY AT THE RACCOON.

wolverene, the racoon began to back away. At the same time the Glutton drew nearer and nearer, his object being to force Lotor from the tree. Finally, poor Lotor could proceed no further ; he had reached the tip end of the limb ; it rocked and shook with his weight, but still he clung to it with all his might, using his little black finger-like claws to keep from falling. With a sudden ugly snarl, the Glutton, seeing his advantage, shot out his cruel white claws into the very face of the racoon, and Lotor, with a childish, whimpering cry of fear, lost his hold and fell. Vainly he clutched at the vines as he went down, sending showers of ripe grapes pelt-ing about him, finally landing half-stunned far below. The wolverene, peering over a limb curiously, to satisfy himself that he had beaten the racoon, lost no more time, but instantly began feeding upon the luscious grapes, hastening to gorge himself in his glutton-like way and working among the vines until he had actually stripped them of every grape.

Off in the heart of Balsam Swamp stood a giant basswood tree. Its trunk was roomy, and partially decayed, and if you were to place your ear against its hoary sides, you might readily hear the fine, high, musical hum of its inmates,

the bees. Year after year they had lived in this particular tree, one colony after another, and no wonder; for this was the finest honey land to be found. Down in the marshes there were such flowers; first, early in spring, almost before snow had melted, in among the low-growing mosses, hid shy bunches of pinky-white arbutus, the sweetest blossoms filled with fragrant nectar. So from earliest spring until Jack Frost came again, the flowers bloomed, covering the marshes like a gay patterned rug, pink, velvet-headed milkweed, lavender asters, and billows of golden-rod flowers, all heavy with their perfumes.

The little black bear mother knew all about the basswood tree and the bees who lived in it. She had been planning her annual visit there for weeks, and one fine day she shambled down from the mountain ridges, followed closely by her two small cubs. But the little mother bear was just too late. She had her long journey all for nothing, for when she came to the basswood tree, she saw above it a great swarming, black mass of very angry bees. Some robber had evidently visited the tree ahead of her and the golden honey had all been stolen, leaving not even a bit for the winter food of the poor defrauded bees.

Now White Claw, the Glutton, lived many miles away, but one day he craved honey, so, craftily he commenced to watch the flowers very intently. Finally, he had the good luck to trail a honey bee, which led him straight to its home in the basswood tree in the heart of the swamp. At the very time Moween, the mother bear, and her cubs reached the tree, White Claw himself, heavily gorged with honey, was wallowing contentedly right in the center of an oozy bed of mud, trying to rid himself of a few angry bees which persisted in clinging to his thick fur coat and had succeeded in stinging his snout rather badly. Many furious bees hung in a cloud right over his mud bed, but White Claw was far too crafty for them; he just remained right there in the soft, pleasant marsh mud until moonrise; then, his stings ceased to smart, because of the cooling mud. Having rid himself of the sticky honey, and best of all, his troublesome enemies, he sauntered off upon his travels once again. In this high-handed manner did White Claw, the greedy one, live. If there was anything good to eat in the forest, eventually he discovered it.

Over on the edge of Beaver Creek in a secret, sheltered spot, where the great spruces stand

more dense, silent, and taller than in any other place in the forest, lived the remainder of a once mighty beaver colony. The old beaver leader had selected this particular place for building his village after searching widely for an unmolested spot where they might not be spied upon, for this the beaver dreads more than anything else in the world.

Night after night had the timorous beavers worked, building up a fine dam, laying hundreds of logs horizontally, then batting them down into place with hard, mud cement, which they made, filling in the chinks with branches and stones. They had delayed building their winter quarters until they had finished the wonderful dam. Then they built seven fine huts, five or six full-grown beavers occupying each hut. The smooth, wet, mud roofs glistened beautifully as they rounded them off symmetrically, slapping down the mud quite evenly and neatly with their flat spade-like tails, which they used exactly as one does a trowel. Soon the frost would come and strengthen the soft mud walls and roofs; then, when the creek was frozen solidly over, all the beavers would retire to rest in the snug chambers of their huts. So every day now, they were engaged in cutting

logs into short lengths; these they carried into the huts, storing them conveniently to nibble on when hard winter really set in.

In spite of the shyness of the beavers, working, as they did so secretly, even at night, there was one who in spite of all their secret methods well knew all about their plans, had been watching them at their work for days and days. Chancing one day to stroll through the forest along the banks of Beaver Creek one night, White Claw suddenly heard a well-known and very delightful sound, nothing less than the slap of a beaver's tail, a sound he had not heard for years. Instantly, he knew there were beavers about and not so very far off. The creature craftily laid his plans; he would have a great and glorious feast, perhaps the finest of his life, for if there is one thing which the wolverene loves better than anything else it is beaver meat.

Well enough did White Claw know that the beavers work best at night, usually resting through the day in their huts. So, very craftily, he determined to delay his feasting that he might catch them unawares, because sly White Claw did not care to run up against a whole colony of beavers, for they have very sharp

claws, and wide, spade-like teeth, strong enough to fell a tree. No, White Claw would not run the risk of meeting the colony; he therefore stayed his pressing appetite with a rabbit, then climbed a tree from which he could watch the beavers at their work. Lying out flat upon a limb he saw them putting the finishing touches to their huts. They worked very rapidly; White Claw could not understand their pressing haste; in fact they worked all that night and the next day without stopping. So the wolverene, hungry as he was, had to stay in the tree until they finished work and retired to their huts.

Thus did White Claw bide his time, thinking to himself all the while how foolish it was of the beavers to work so desperately hard. Gradually the air grew keener and colder. Finally the beavers, at a signal from the old leader, left off their work and went into their huts. White Claw knew he must wait until they were sound asleep, so he remained in the tree. The moon rose pale and cold over the creek, and soon the water beneath him was frozen over, and then the wolverene began to climb down from his retreat.

All about the beaver huts the wise beavers had dug deep trenches, into which the water

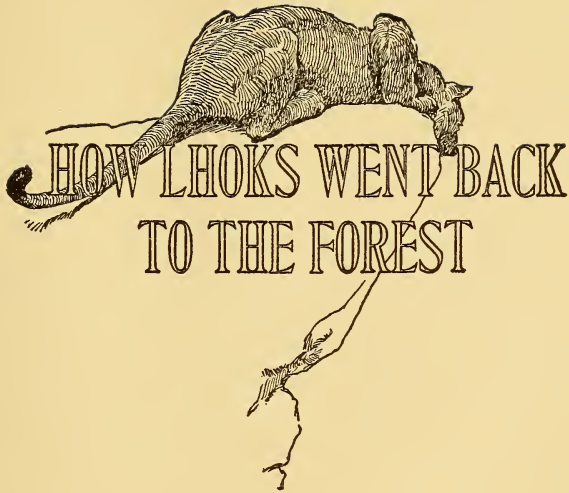
had flowed and was now frozen over with thick, blue ice. Hardly able to restrain his pressing hunger, White Claw came to the nearest hut and struck his heavy claws into the smooth roof, expecting it to crumble instantly at his touch, and disclose the helpless, sleeping beavers. Imagine his dismay when the roof failed to yield or break beneath his claws! Then he learned that he could never break it open; it was frozen hard, the roof was as firm as a rock, and the greedy White Claw was just too late. The beavers had been far wiser than the wolverene; they knew just when a great freeze might be expected; that is why they worked so diligently trying to get their roofs and walls up, hoping to finish them before the great Frost Spirit arrived. Thus was White Claw the Glutton outwitted by Jack Frost, and the gentle, hard-working beavers saved from the frightful white claws of the cruel one.

As you can well imagine, the wolverene was now fiercely angry and almost mad with his pressing hunger, so for the time his usually keen wits deserted him. All he thought about now was to find something to eat. He growled crossly to himself and slunk back into the woods. Vainly he searched many old, well-re-

membered trails looking for the game scent. The sudden change of weather had sent most of the wild things back into their snug burrows ; they would not venture out until hunger pressed. Once White Claw spied Redbrush, the fox, off on a distant trail. The wolverene struck across by a short cut hoping to head him off, but Redbrush, the crafty one, came out ahead of the trail, actually pausing a second to send back at the wolverene an impudent, leering kind of grin, then bounding off upon another track.

At last the wolverene determined to take anything which came across his trail ; he was far too hungry now to be dainty about his food. He passed by a great, decayed log. Surely something had moved, right in one end of the log. Suddenly he began to dig out heaps of brown leaves which had been stuffed into the log. He dug furiously, and finally out rolled a sleepy porcupine. Usually White Claw would have spurned such fare, but quite overcome by his long fast he made a hasty meal of the hedgehog, which was so stupified with sleep it did not bother him greatly. Then it happened, the next morning when certain of the wild kindred passed over that trail, they halted rather curiously to inspect a large, round mass

of dark fur which Jack Frost had lightly sprinkled over with glittering frost crystals. It was the wolverene, dead right in his tracks. Over his cruel jaws he still held his white gleaming claws, trying vainly to rid himself of the sharp quill which had penetrated his brain. Thus ended the greedy career of White Claw, terror of all the wild, and the greatest glutton in all the woods.



II

HOW LHOKS WENT BACK TO THE FOREST

LHOKS, the panther, peered sullenly and discontentedly forth from behind the bars of his cage at the curious crowd of people who stared in at him, and baring his sharp white teeth angrily, snarled at them crossly. Again he resumed his uneasy pad, pad, padding walk, up and down the narrow floor of his prison, which, with six other similar gaily painted cages, occupied by other unfortunate wild animals, belonged to a small traveling menagerie.

Lhoks was a handsome animal, and the boys and girls who gathered in crowds around his cage gazed at him with round eyes of admiring awe. He happened to be a very large specimen of his kind, measuring about eleven feet in length. His coat was reddish-brown, now grown somewhat shabby, owing to his long confinement in the narrow cage. A small patch of white fur marked either side of his muzzle. His snarling lips showed jet black, also the tip

of his tail, which he lashed angrily. His eyes, which Lhoks half closed when angry or cross, were of gleaming greenish yellow, showing golden lights. Over his cage door one might read: "Panther, or American Lion."

It happened three years before, that Lhoks and two other small panther cubs had been left alone by the old panthers, who went off to hunt; feeling lonely, but full of mischief and play, they came out of their safe den, to frolic upon a wide flat ledge. There upon the rock they all played together happily, rolling over each other and cuffing with their clumsy kitten-like paws. And there the hunter came across them, and so young and unafraid were the small panthers that they allowed the man to carry them off. When the old panthers returned to the den it was quite empty; their babies were gone. For days and days they followed vainly the long trail of the robber, with red, revengeful eyes, but they never caught up with him, hunt as they might.

Two of the cubs died in captivity, but Lhoks, strong and more lusty than the others, lived. For three years he had traveled with the menagerie, but oh, how he hated the life, and with all the longing in his heart, he would dream, in

his wild way, of the dark, balsam scented woods, the safe retreats, where he might hide in secret, silent places of his forest. Most of all did he hate the blare of the loud music, which made him howl, and deeply too did he resent the staring eyes of the curious crowds. Sullenly he would glower back at them. Often he felt weak and sick in the close confining quarters of his hated cage; so much so, that he would stretch out his tawny body miserably upon the floor and lie there for hours. But alas for poor Lhoks during show hours, should he chance to appear stupid and sleepy and ill when the people came to stare at him! Then some one was sure to reach into his cage with a long red pole, to the end of which was attached a cruel, sharp spike, and then they would poke and prod the poor animal until he got upon his feet. Just one sharp prod of the spike was usually enough to make Lhoks jump up and snarl and begin once more his endless pacing back and forth, from end to end of his prison.

Then the delighted crowd would shiver and exclaim at his dreadful fierceness, and often poke him playfully with canes or umbrellas, just to make him yell loudly. The howls of Lhoks the panther were terrifying, and when he

screamed out it usually stirred up all the other animals of the menagerie. Then King, an old, toothless lion, would roar, and two slinky, lean hyenas who occupied a green cage right next to Lhoks would sound their disagreeable cry, the beautiful gentle gazelle would shiver and tremble with fear, and there would be much excitement.

If Lhoks hated the crowds, he soon learned to dread most of all the long, overland journeys by rail. Then the cages would all be loaded upon freight cars, and for days they would rumble and jolt and sway dizzily in their close, ill-smelling quarters; if water was not handy, sometimes the attendants neglected them, and forgot that the poor caged things were very thirsty. Often at the end of a trip they arrived faint, car-sick, and so exhausted they were barely able to stagger to their cramped legs.

The season for the menagerie was drawing to its close, and they were about to go East for the winter. The glittering cages had been opened to the public for the last time in a small Western town, where the wondering boys and girls had taken their last look at Lhoks, the panther, and his wild companions. The last cage had been

loaded upon the train, and the long, heavy freight started out upon its journey. Old King, the lion, had died, and most of the other animals showed only too plainly the effects of their long confinement and hard life. The tawny coat of poor Lhoks was shabbiest of all. It actually looked moth-eaten in places, and his sides showed plainly enough the scars which the sharp spike had made. His ribs were seen through his lean hide, for he had almost lost his appetite ; he felt weak and discouraged. So he just lay stretched listlessly upon the floor of his cage, while the long train jolted and screamed its way across the flat country of the West. Fortunately, the cage of the panther had been placed in such a position that Lhoks soon discovered that by standing upon his hind legs he could actually peer out through his small, grated window at the country through which they journeyed. In this respect, he was more lucky than the others, for the gazelle and hyena cages had been placed with their small, ventilating windows pushed up against the other cages, so they could not look out.

For many days, whenever Lhoks chanced to look forth from his small window, they appeared to be passing over the same flat, uninter-

esting plain, although occasionally he caught a fleeting glimpse of forest and hills in the distance. At night he would lie flat, gazing up longingly, managing to catch a peep at the little winking stars, and sometimes, when it was bright moonlight, he would grow very restless and unhappy, pacing up and down, howling dismally. How he hated the commotion and loud noises about the freight yards, when their train was shunted back and forth over switches, creaking and squealing, with much loose rattling of rusty iron couplings, and yells from the trainmen, who swung red-eyed lanterns, and ran swiftly and lightly over the tops of the cages.

Finally, after many weary days, for their train was a very slow one, Lhoks began to brighten up, for the air which now found its way into his close cage had begun to change and freshen ; now he would stand at his small, barred window and sniff in long drafts of it with keen delight. Also, Lhoks saw that they had now left the disagreeable, flat country, and were speeding through wild forests, where giant spruce and pines grew dense and tall. Off in the distance there were glimpses of purple chains of mountains, and rolling, peaceful hills. From that

time on, Lhoks became a changed animal ; as by magic all his weariness appeared to vanish ; he was once more himself, wild and alert. All night he would stand now at the window just breathing in the tonic of this fine, new air, the bracing odors which came from thousands of fragrant balsams and pines. For, although Lhoks did not suspect it, he happened to be passing, at that time, right through the very heart of his own home country, the land where perhaps even then his parents were still roving wild and free through the hidden jungles of the great North woods.

The long, snake-like train rumbled and screeched its way through the night, hooting and echoing through the deep mountain cuts, then gliding out over long moonlit stretches, where moist, woodsy odors came in waves to poor Lhoks in his prison cage.

“Chuck, chuck, chuck-chuck, chuck,” repeated the iron car wheels, over and over again, almost like the rhythm of some tiresome song. Then, suddenly, on ahead, the great engine began to send forth hoot after hoot, strange alarm cries, whistlings and screechings which echoed through the silent forest. Lhoks instinctively knew something had happened, and leaped to

his feet. The next moment the heavy car, cages and all, had been tossed from the rails and lay a splintered mass at the foot of a deep cut.

Something wonderful happened to Lhoks the panther, for his cage had chanced to fall right side up, and one wall of it had actually fallen out; he was free—free at last. It took a few seconds for the poor wild thing to discover that he was a prisoner no longer, after spending so many long, hateful years in his close cage. But very soon all his old, wild nature asserted itself, and he made out that there were tall waving pines all about him, instead of walls and iron bars, and beneath a dense, black jungle of spruce—fine places to hide. But oh, he must be quick, or they would find him. Gathering up all his strength, with one long leap Lhoks, the captive, bounded off to his freedom and the shelter of the woods.

Of course, in the excitement which followed the wreck, no one thought of looking for the panther; for, as it happened, he was the only animal which had managed to escape alive. Lhoks could not travel so very fast at first, for he had a touch of rheumatism, and his legs were almost stiff from long confinement, while his usually sharp claws were quite worn off and

dulled. So he skulked along the ground, hiding himself in some deep, woody retreat far away from the shouts of the trainmen. Having rested he finally began to take some interest in his appearance, groomed his roughened coat and sharpened his dull claws upon a log. Suddenly he realized that he was hungry. Oh, how delightedly did he quench his thirst at a beautiful, fern-grown pool. Then one day he discovered the trail of a lone wood-chopper and followed it for hours, because he began to feel lonely, and also was hungry. Perhaps he imagined that the man would feed him, as had his keeper. It was lucky for poor, trusting Lhoks that the man did not spy him, or he might have been shot, for the man would surely have supposed the panther was trailing *him* for its prey.

Lhoks forsook the man's trail finally, and that day he managed to catch a rabbit, which served him very well. For weeks so wandered the poor, solitary panther all alone over the wild forest trails. Each day fresh strength and courage came to him; already his tawny coat had lost its roughness; the new hair was coming in, filling the deep scars upon his sides with soft, fine fur. Suddenly he began to feel so very happy that for sheer playfulness, and because of

his loneliness, he would play kittenishly, rolling and pawing about a round stone which he found; springing high in the air he would often chase his own shadow down the moonlit trails; occasionally, he would strive to gain some almost forgotten scent, then he would lift his black muzzle and utter a long, lonely yell—a cry in the night, once heard, never forgotten, this yell of a panther—just a pleading cry for his lost companions for whom he yearned.

Once Lhoks met with an encounter which he never forgot. He happened upon a round ball of curious appearance which lay right in his path, and feeling in a playful mood, he boldly jumped at the thing, tossing it about. Then suddenly the bundle unrolled itself, an ugly, blunt snout appeared, and two sullen, angry eyes glared at him insolently. Before he could back away, a prickly tail slapped him smartly right across his soft, black muzzle, and it was filled with quills. After that, Lhoks the panther never forgot how Unk-Wunk, the porcupine, looked when he rolled himself into a ball and went to sleep upon the trail. It became harder to find food down in the lowlands, so Lhoks took to the mountain passes, and thus it happened, one memorable day, he chanced upon a strangely

familiar, alluring scent. For a day he trailed it, drawing gradually nearer and nearer, and as he found the scent keener, Lhoks began to feel greatly excited, filled with courage and hope, for he had stumbled across an old trail of one of his own kindred.

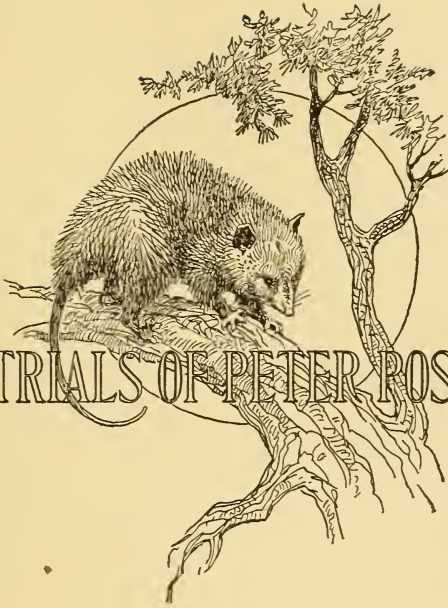
Although the panther, or mountain lion, is not at present so very common in the North country, occasionally, back in some solitary section, right in the heart of the wild mountain forests, where even the woodman's axe has not been heard, there still lurk a few of the panther tribe.

With his wild senses all alert, Lhoks now continued to follow patiently the trail. It brought him at last out upon a plateau, or clearing. Closer and closer to the edge of the ledgy plateau crept Lhoks, now crawling low upon his stomach, exactly like a cat. Then, having gained the edge, hanging his great tawny head over the rock, he peered with curious, wistful eyes at the strangely beautiful sight spread just beneath him. Upon a jutting rock frolicked five panther cubs; little furry creatures they were, barred with dark tiger-like stripes, as are all young panthers. There in the sunshine they were playing innocently, while Lhoks watched

them wistfully and anxiously, with half-shut, curious, yellow eyes, his whole body shaking and trembling with nervous longing to be with them. Even the tip of his tail lashed the rock frantically, so interested had he become in the kitten cubs. They were quite alone, for the mother panther, having lost her mate, was even now away seeking food for them.

At last, unable to withstand the cunning ways of the cubs an instant longer, Lhoks leaped lightly down among them, and so trusting were they that he became acquainted with them at once. When the mother panther returned, she found a stranger with her babies, playing with them, letting them roll over him and tease him roughly, mauling him about as they would, while Lhoks, the lonely one, lay stretched out contentedly purring for sheer happiness. Strangely enough the mother panther did not resent the appearance of Lhoks; perhaps she imagined he would be useful in helping her forage for food for her family. At any rate, she welcomed him with peaceful purrs, and so all was well. Thus did Lhoks, the panther, come back to his kindred once again in the heart of the great forest.

THE TRIALS OF PETER ROSSUM



III

THE TRIALS OF PETER POSSUM

PETER POSSUM was in great trouble, for he had lost his mate. No wonder that he felt strangely lonely and sad. Most of the opossum tribe are noted for their love of family and companionship. Peter had been born and reared in the South, right in the heart of a great cypress swamp, an ideal spot for the home of any possum. Dark and lonely was the swamp jungle, with its tall pines and giant gum and cypress trees beneath which lay trackless thickets of thorn and holly, while trailing in long, snaky lengths over all, grew matted bamboo vines and hanging mosses which looked like long gray beards.

Months before, Peter and his mate had built for themselves a deep, new nest down in the hollow heart of a giant cypress tree. And now what worried Peter most of all was that wherever Mrs. Possum now might be, she had carried away their eleven little possum babies with her

in her velvet-lined pouch or pocket which she wore for that especial purpose in her side.

Not until all the little possums were large enough to be trusted outside alone would their fond mother allow them to leave this velvet-lined pouch. The little possums, when she went away, were just about the size of mice, with sharp, pink noses, tiny wriggling tails, bits of beady, black eyes, and the softest, mole-like fur coats. Little helpless things they were. No wonder, then, that Peter was full of anxiety and almost dazed over the mysterious disappearance of all his family. Vainly he searched for them all through the swamp in their usual haunts, but no trace could he discover of Mrs. Possum and her pocketful of little possums.

It had been two whole nights now since Mrs. Possum had been away from the home nest. As Mrs. Possum had a habit of going off alone occasionally, Peter had not thought much about it the first night she was away, for, to tell the truth, that same night he had taken a secret trip into the far end of the swamp, just to see if a certain gnarled, old persimmon tree which he happened to remember was going to bear fruit that year.

So off Peter had started, all by himself. It

was very pleasant to stroll through the swamp on a moonlight night, and really Peter traveled much farther than he had intended. Suddenly, right in the direction of his home tree, he heard a horrible din which actually made his long, wavy gray fur rise right up from his fat back.

“Wow-wow-ooo-oo-o!” It was the hounds; they were out in full cry; they were scouring the swamp for possums or racoons. Peter was thankful now that he was not at home. Surely, he thought, Mrs. Possum, whom he had left at home with the eleven little possums, would have tact enough not to show even the tip of her sharp snout outside the nest while the hounds were about. But in spite of all this, Peter was uneasy about his family; so, without even finding out if the old persimmon tree would bear fruit that season, he made a bee-line for home.

“Wow-ooow, ow, ow, ooo!” Again the hounds bayed, and close at hand this time. Peter laid his small black ears tight to his head, as he streaked in and out of the tangled jungles, looking like a glint of something silvery when the moonbeams struck against his gray fur coat. Suddenly the hounds leaped right out in plain sight of Peter. Instantly he had spied them—three yellow terrors with their long flappy ears,

eager, dribbling jaws, and red, bleary eyes, which could spy out a coon or possum, no matter how tall a tree he had climbed into to hide.

This happened to be a lucky night for Peter, and he managed to save his gray pelt, reaching his home tree before the moon went down.

He began to hitch and claw his way up the tree, not too hurriedly, because Peter was very fat. A fat possum cannot climb a large tree trunk very fast; that is why a possum, if he is big and fat, will usually select a small tree when he wishes to climb out of danger very quickly. When Peter got up to the entrance of the nest, the gray, furry face of Mrs. Possum, with its round gentle eyes, was not there to greet him as usual. When he climbed down deep into the nest, no soft warm body was there to break his fall, and no gentle welcoming growl did he hear; the nest was cold and empty.

At first, Peter fancied that she had simply gone out of the nest to get a breath of fresh air, and perhaps allow the little possums to get a view of the swamp by moonlight, so he didn't worry so very much about her absence. Instead, he just rolled himself up and took a nap, expecting any minute to be awakened by the coming of his mate, when she rolled heavily down into

the nest. At daybreak Peter awoke and still Mrs. Possum had not returned. Now Peter, in his funny possum way, was fond of his family, so instead of sleeping all that day, as he usually did, he started out to look for them. First, he took a peek away down below from the edge of the nest; everything was already beginning to wake up for the day. Peter watched his hated neighbors, two old black buzzards, start off, and actually dodged quickly back into the nest as their great shabby, rag-like wings swept close to his gray coat. Once, when the buzzard family were away, and there were eggs in their nest, Peter and his mate were foolish enough to visit their untidy home to which the old birds returned before Peter and his mate could get away, and then one horrid old buzzard, with a twist of its ugly, skinny neck had "unswallowed" its breakfast upon Peter's fine fur coat. Such is the disgusting habit of all the buzzard tribe, and one such experience was enough for Peter; he never went near the buzzards again.

After the scavenger birds had disappeared from sight, Peter climbed high up into the top of his tree, where he could look far across the swamp. He saw away off beyond the swamp, the plantations, stretching as far as the eye could reach, and

crisscrossing them in all directions the deep irrigation ditches, where one might wander for miles, and become lost as in a city of many streets.

Finally Peter went back into the nest again; there he slept all day, expecting to hear the welcome scratching of Mrs. Possum's claws upon the tree trunk any moment. But in vain; she did not come. Had she been caught by the hounds?

At sunset Peter watched the buzzards come sailing back home for the night and settle themselves in their soiled feathers, looking just like two black bundles of rags clinging among the tufted pines. Then the whippoorwills away down close to the ground, hidden among the thorn tangles, began their lonely calls. And at last, unable to bear the loneliness a minute longer, Peter slid hastily down the tree into the shadows. Soon the moon, which was now big and yellow, came peeping through the dark pines, lighting up the dark places and finally, to his great joy, Peter actually stumbled upon the trail of his lost mate.

Poor thing! She had not been able to travel very fast because she carried the eleven little possums in her pouch, so it was easy to follow her tracks, as her heavy body had left certain

deep impressions in the soft moss. He discovered many places where she had stopped to rest—deep, round hollows ; perhaps she had lain low to keep away from the hounds. Peter followed her trail patiently, and at last he came to the edge of the plantations crossed by the maze of ditches, almost as deep as two men are high. Then Peter's troubles and trials began at the first ditch. He found where his mate had entered a ditch, gone over it for a long distance, then turned off uncertainly into still another ditch, finally coming back again to the very place she had started from. Oh, it was a very easy matter indeed to lose one's way in the perplexing ditches, and so all the next day Peter traveled hopefully up and down them, searching everywhere for his lost family. There was not much to eat in the ditches, although when very hard pressed by hunger, an opossum will eat anything. Opossums, you know, are really *night scavengers*. But you may be certain that the unpleasant old buzzards who float all day over the plantations, watching the ditches, had left little which a possum might care to eat.

Next day Peter climbed out of the ditches and hid himself in a very thick holly tree, trusting that its prickly leaves would conceal him while

he rested. When twilight came, again he took up his search in the ditches. Bravely poor Peter searched them night after night. Occasionally he came across a trap which some negro laborer had placed in the mouth of a ditch, hoping to catch a coon. But Peter managed to keep his feet out of them.

Up and down, up and down, wearily searched the faithful Peter, occasionally filled with great hope, for the scent which he followed would appear quite fresh and near, but the next moment he lost all clue again. At last, in spite of himself, Peter had almost made up his mind to the terrible thought that his little gray-coated mate had been trapped, or perhaps she had become bewildered and lost her way in some deep, dark hole, finally perishing of hunger. Of course the little possums weighed her down heavily so she could never climb up out of the ditches.

Peter very sadly and reluctantly made up his mind to give up his vain search and go back to the swamps again. But they say "'Tis always darkest before dawn," and that very night when he was about to give up, he struck into an unusually deep ditch. A stray moonbeam filtered down into the dark hole, lighting up the path ahead for some distance. Then, all of a sudden,

Peter thought he saw something moving toward him ; perhaps it was a coon, for dearly the coons love to roam through the broom-corn ditches when the young corn is in the milk. The longer Peter looked at the thing coming toward him, however, the less did it appear like a coon, and somehow, it seemed strangely familiar to him—the heavy swaying, waddling body ; and the next moment Peter saw, where the moonlight struck it, the thing was all *silvery gray*. The reason Peter did not recognize his little mate in the first place, for indeed it was Mrs. Possum herself, was just this :

It seems that the eleven little possum babies had been gone so long, they had now quite outgrown their mother's pocket, and so she had let them all climb out upon her broad, silvery back. And in order to keep them together safely, she showed each little possum that by curling its tail tight around her own long, muscular one, which she carried over her back, it might ride in safety. In this fashion Mrs. Possum herself waddled hopefully up and down the long, maze-like ditches, vainly looking for an outlet.

“Grr-r-r-r,” rumbled the delighted Peter, recognizing his mate, and greeting her in his queer possum way by rubbing his black nose

fondly against Mrs. Possum's black, pointed snout. Then Peter and his mate with the eleven little possum children still clinging to her back turned about, and Peter found the right road at last, which led them all straight back to the swamp.

Back in the jungles they found themselves after a long, weary journey. They were very happy to be once more among their jolly neighbors, the racoons, sniffing again the sweet scented woods, the yellow jasmine flowers, listening again to catch the soft, sweet notes of their friends, the mocking-birds, who sang their beautiful trills in the moonlight. Peter and his mate were even glad to see their unpleasant neighbors again, the buzzards, which actually craned their skinny necks curiously, watching the return of Mrs. Possum and her large family as she climbed back into the cypress tree.

The persimmons on the old, gnarled persimmon tree are growing plumper and riper; it needs but a light touch of Jack Frost to make them tasty. Then Peter Possum and his mate with the eleven possum babies, who by that time will be able to travel alone, are planning to have a grand feast, far away from the dreaded plantation ditches, right in the safe shelter of their dear old swamp.



IV

THE MINNOW TWINS

ONCE upon a time the minnow family had been a very large one, for there were fifteen of the children by actual count ; but one day a cruel net was dropped lightly into the brook, and twelve of them were scooped up and taken away. All that remained were Father and Mother Minnow, Baby Minnow, and the Twins.

It was such a delightful brook where the minnow family lived—one of the kind which runs along quietly for a short way, then suddenly bursts into little laughing ripples, bubbling, foaming, and hurrying along madly, as though it were trying to race away from itself. The brown bed of the brook was all paved with wonderful pebbles, and when the sun shone down upon them they sparkled just like fairy jewels. Oh, quite wonderful are the hidden treasures of the brook ! It is filled with queer, interesting brook people.

The black and yellow turtle family lived

beneath a tussock of coarse grass just at the bend of the brook, where the limb of an old tree had fallen, and lay half submerged in the water. Quite convenient it was, too, for the turtles ; one would usually find some of them sunning upon the log ; and when they all came out, they made a long line quite across the log, and frequently jostled each other "plump" off into deep water.

Below, in a dark, still place, all day long the "lucky bug" family darted stupidly and aimlessly to and fro upon the mirror-like surface ; and just above, under the roots of an old willow tree, whose snaky roots projected far into the water, lived Mr. and Mrs. Muskrat, and their three young ones. Beneath a flat rock, which shelved out into the water further down-stream, where it was deep, still, and mysteriously shadowy, two large fierce pickerel had their haunts ; regular robbers and bandits they were, who made their living by preying upon everything which came within their reach. There were endless other families, all more or less interesting, which lived upon the banks, or within the brown waters of the brook.

But this time I am going to tell you about the minnows. In spite of the cruel net, which of course broke up the family, the minnows

were about the jolliest family living in the brook. Father and Mother Minnow were very old and wise. They had wonderfully large, green bulging eyes, which looked not unlike green glass marbles, and could detect the approach of an enemy yards away. Then they would whisk out of sight in an instant, under the nearest stone, remaining right there until the danger passed.

Next in importance came the Twins, and they were so precisely alike that only their mother could really tell them apart. She knew quite well that one of them wore an extra speckle of brown upon his right side. The Twins were forever getting into scrapes, and were full of mischievous pranks, which caused their parents no end of anxiety. Because they were so full of curiosity about everything, these Twins had to investigate any strange thing which entered the brook; this, in spite of oft-repeated warnings from their parents. I must not forget to mention the baby, a little bit of a slim, brown minnow, and so very timid that he seldom left his mother's side.

One day the minnows were all swimming together happily down-stream, pausing occasionally to exchange pleasant greetings with their

neighbors. Just as they were passing the coarse grass tussock, Mrs. Spotted-Turtle stuck her head out between the grasses to tell them of an accident which had befallen one of her family, the youngest; one of his feet had been bitten off by the cruel old pickerel who lived downstream.

So very much interested were Mr. and Mrs. Minnow in listening to this sad story that they forgot to keep a watchful eye upon the Twins who, as soon as they discovered that they were not being watched, darted fleetly off and were soon out of sight around a bend of the brook. They longed for strange, new adventures, thrilling things, and were quite mad with joy to be out of sight of the kind, watchful eyes of their parents, whom they considered unduly fussy and strict. Baby Minnow attempted to follow the Twins, but soon gave up and just waited under the edge of a pebble until his parents should join him.

Off and away darted the Twins; so swiftly did they travel that their slim sides flashed through the water like arrows of gold and silver. Wild with delight and freedom they often gave little sudden leaps and skips quite out of the water. They mischievously and wil-

fully swam in among the "lucky bug" family, scattering them far and wide, until the foolish things completely lost their heads, darting confusedly in all directions. The Twins even forgot to watch the spot where a pair of cruel jaws armed with sharp teeth usually lay in wait for them, snapping dangerously as they passed by the pickerel's den. But he did not catch them, because they were swimming too rapidly for the sly old fellow who had been napping and was sluggish in his movements.

A whole drove of pale yellow butterflies joined the Twins just above the pickerel hole, and kept them company a long distance down-stream, dancing merrily along over the water until a robin flew in among them and scattered them in all directions. Oh, they were never lonely upon their way; there was plenty of company. Musically hummed the blue, lace wings of a team of giant dragon-flies which escorted them for some distance. As the dragon-flies spent too much time darting for gnats, the Twins left them far behind. Soon they were a long way down-stream. The brook was full of surprises for them, as it gradually widened, and the sweet-flags and cat-tails grew tall and dense to the very edge of the water. They traveled

less swiftly and swam in and out of the shallows, investigating the jeweled pebbles, aimlessly nibbling in a bed of watercress. Finally they paused to rest and take a leisurely view of their new surroundings.

Just in the edge of the water directly in front of them near the watercress patch suddenly they espied a strange, glittering object. Never in their lives had the Twins seen anything like this thing before them. Larger than any pebble it was and far more beautiful. They knew about scoup-nets, and for a time viewed the strange thing before them with misgivings. However, it failed to move, so they sidled cautiously nearer and nearer. Perhaps it was something good to eat, and they were decidedly hungry. It felt smooth and cool to the touch as they brushed it with their fins. Wonderful! There was an opening at one end, but it was not a mouth, because there were no teeth; therefore it would not bite.

Finally, one Twin poked his head boldly into the opening and entered. Strangely enough his twin could plainly see him upon the other side of the object. He signaled with one fin for his brother to join him, that all was safe, nothing to fear, and then both the Minnow Twins went

right inside the glass jar, for that was what it was. In an instant the boy who owned the glass jar had pulled the string which was tied about its neck, only the foolish minnows had not seen it, and the next moment they were captives.

Frantically they dashed about the glass prison, bumping their noses cruelly, until at last, quite exhausted by their efforts to get free, they finally lay panting at the bottom of the jar. Occasionally they would rise to the top for air, but oh, how miserably unhappy they were. They could picture to themselves even now the agony of mind their parents and little brother endured as they searched frantically behind every pebble to find their wayward children.

They longed, oh, so sadly, for their beloved brook with its shady haunts, to lie basking in the clear water which the sun warmed pleasantly, while their neighbors sang sweetly above them—the bluebird, the thrush, and hundreds of other birds which charmed and entertained them all day long when they came to bathe in the brook.

The water in the fruit-jar was rapidly growing stale and lifeless. The Twins realized that they could not live there very long. What would be their sad fate? Cautiously they looked from

their glass prison ; the boy was no longer in sight. Soon all became dark about them and they knew it was night. Doubtless their parents and little brother were dreaming peacefully down deep in the cool, dark waters of the brook in a favorite nook beneath some broad lily leaf.

Next morning the Twins were barely alive ; they lay gasping weakly. Suddenly a great striped paw armed with hooked claws was thrust down into the jar which it overturned, Minnow Twins and all, and the Twins thought their last moment had come. Then the boy appeared and they heard him say :

“ Hi, there, Pussy, you rogue. Clear out. You’re trying to steal my minnows that I worked so hard to catch for bait. Scat ! scat ! ”

The boy put the minnows back into the jar and poured fresh water upon them, which served to revive them wonderfully. Another boy finally appeared carrying a tin pail in which he had many other unfortunate minnows.

“ I know a dandy place to fish,” he exclaimed ; “ there’s an awful big pickerel lives right under a great, flat stone, down near the swimming hole. Come on ; let’s go and try for him.”

It was a very hot day, and by the time the boys reached the brook they had decided to

take a little swim in a certain deep hole, down by the willows, so they set the pail and jar carefully on a stone beside the brook. They were in such a rush to get undressed and plunge into the water that they had a race to see which should get in first.

Thus it happened that one boy in pulling off his shoe aimed it carelessly at the fruit-jar. Over it toppled with a jingling crash, and the next instant the Minnow Twins were back in the brook and had darted out of sight under a stone. Here they lay just a few seconds, because they felt a little weak after their confinement. At last they stole cautiously forth, and as good luck would have it found themselves right in a little bed of mint. They nibbled greedily of the healing mint roots, and soon the wonderful tonic made them quite strong again. Whisking off and looking warily to right and left, they started in the direction of their old haunts.

Soon dear, familiar landmarks began to appear. They hailed with delight the form of old Mrs. Muskrat, gray and fat, sitting upon the bank scolding her children crossly through her whiskers. Their little friend, the water wag-tail bird, came tiptoeing in and out of the brook, searching every pebble for bugs, just as

she always did day after day. She gave a droll little flirt, a sort of welcome, with her funny little tail as the Minnow Twins slid quickly by. The gray squirrels were chasing each other up and down the tree trunks merrily, and surely—yes, far up-stream they caught sight of the old, familiar log, which lay just below the grass tussock, and right there Mrs. Spotted-Turtle and her family lay sunning themselves, ranged in a long line down the log. All the little turtles craned their scaly, spotted necks over the log as the minnows passed under, and one of the turtles which recognized the Twins flopped off the log in his excitement into deep water.

Quickly the Twins passed on and soon they arrived at the familiar bend where the white birch hung, dipping its silvery leaves into the brook. Two chubby, glistening minnows closely followed by a little bit of a slim baby minnow darted out to meet the homesick Twins. They were made welcome with rejoicing and much nose-rubbing right back into the bosom of the minnow family once more.

That night all the minnows rested quietly far down in the bottom of the brook just beneath the protection of a large flat stone. The whip-poorwills came as they always did every evening

to sing their lullaby songs on the top of the old rail fence near, and everything was peaceful and beautiful once more. If you tread very carefully and lightly through the long grasses bordering the brook and peer deep down into a certain nook perhaps you may be able to discover the entire minnow family some day. You may be sure of the very spot if you look for the old log, the grass tussock, and you may see some of the yellow-spotted turtle family sunning themselves, if you have good luck.

HOW PORCURINE RIDGE WAS
SETTLED



V

HOW PORCUPINE RIDGE WAS SETTLED

THE remains of a large camp-fire smouldered, right in the heart of a forest of giant spruces far up in the North country. It had smouldered there sullenly all through a long, summer day, being left by the campers to die of its own accord. By this time they were far away, striking a new trail through the woods.

Night was coming on now. Down in the still, dark places, stealthy sounds, rustlings, and padded footsteps might be heard along wild trails, for with the coming of darkness the prowlers, who forage best at night, were beginning to stir abroad. Certain dark, shambling figures—one, two, three—came shuffling across a streak of moonlit forest. It was Moween, the little black mother bear and her two cubs. They had come down from their mountain den to hunt in the deep forest lowlands and swamps. Redbrush, the old fox, hit the trail in hot haste; he had scented wonderful game, perhaps a covey

of plump, sleeping partridges. Impatiently he made a sudden, wide detour, even crossing a brook and wetting his feet, which he disliked, just to avoid meeting a cross old lynx whom he despised. Two cottontails, also scenting both fox and lynx, leaped high over the tops of the rank brakes and bounded off in another direction with long leaps, halting to lie flat, trembling and panting, staying there concealed until the dreaded ones had gone on. It happened that what the cottontails had imagined to be a lynx or Redbrush, the fox, was only Unk-Wunk, the porcupine, grubbing unconcernedly over the trail, grunting to himself monotonously his "unk-wunk, unk-wunk," rattling his quills softly as he crept leisurely in and out among the tall ferns, fearing neither man nor beast.

Occasionally he would halt to root, pig fashion, beneath some rotten log for grubs or wake-robin roots, for which he had a great desire. Then again he would stop, and standing upon his hind legs he would reach up and strip off the bark from some young, tender sapling with his sharp teeth. Not very far behind Unk-Wunk followed another porcupine, his mate. She was somewhat smaller in size and less ag-

gressive and also, if possible, just a trifle more stupid-looking and droll than he. In fact, she would actually pass right by some really choice morsel which she wished keenly, just because it happened to be a little outside the range of her small, dull piggy eyes. So, often Unk-Wunk would stop to nose out food for her, for she usually depended upon him to locate the meals for both of them, and he seldom failed her.

To-night Unk-Wunk was very keen upon a new trail, but you never would have suspected it from his manner, because he never hurried. Still, if you knew him very well indeed, you might detect that his gait was rather more confident than usual, that in spite of his devious turnings aside, he always returned again to the same trail. All day the two porcupines had slept well in the round, deeply hollowed-out hole of a spruce tree, and between naps Unk-Wunk had watched with growing interest a thin, blue spiral of smoke as it filtered and wavered through the tops of the tall spruces far above. Upon several occasions the porcupine had seen similar trails of mysterious blue smoke, and whenever, out of sheer curiosity, he had followed the smoke to its lair, always had he been repaid for his long journey, because smoke usu-

ally meant a camp, and campers recklessly threw away much food, more especially bones, bacon rinds, and even nubbins of mouldy pork or ham.

So Unk-Wunk, the wise one, lifted his blunt muzzle from time to time and sniffed deeply of the faint, delicious odors which sudden winds blew in whiffs from the far-off camp. As soon as it commenced to grow dusky down below, Unk-Wunk grunted to his mate to follow, and together they started off upon their raids.

Naturally selfish of nature and secretive is the porcupine, and when an inquisitive intruder ventured to cross Unk-Wunk's trail, he would hold his own ground, never stirring from his tracks, but, standing sullenly in the path, force everything to turn out for him. Or, should they presume to show courage enough to face him, he would simply drop right down in his tracks, roll himself into the well-known prickly ball, and let them come on. This they usually decided not to do in the end, for most wanderers along the trails were not deceived; well they knew that out of his small, dull-appearing eyes Unk-Wunk was craftily watching their every movement, waiting for them to come near enough to him to slap them with his barb-laden tail.

Thus Unk-Wunk and his mate grubbed along, not too hurriedly, which would have been a mistake, for some other watcher might have its curiosity aroused and follow them, and they would perhaps be compelled to share their find with another. Finally following devious trails, the porcupines reached the deserted camp. Unk-Wunk was glad there was no one there, because once, when he had gnawed very loudly, a sleeping man had been awakened and fired a gun at him.

Wandering in and out among the blackened embers groped Unk-Wunk grunting impatiently while nosing over a pile of empty tin cans. But soon, to his joy, he discovered a bone which he rasped and rasped, pushing away his mate when she presumed to touch it. Next, oh, joy, he found a long bacon rind. He actually fought with his mate for this, forcing her to go back to a greasy board which he had been gnawing.

Things began to look more promising and Unk-Wunk and his mate were so busy with their foraging, they utterly failed to hear the soft, velvet, padded footsteps of another, who had been following their trail from the first. They failed also to catch the gleam of a pair of blazing, yellow eyes which peered out at them

maliciously from behind the blackened background of a stump, watching, watching their every movement. It was a large tawny wildcat. For some time the cat watched the porcupines, lashing its tail softly against the pliant ferns; each instant the tail seemed to switch a trifle more impatiently; the wildcat was making ready for an attack. Finally, unable to endure their grunts of joy an instant longer, for the cat was gaunt with hunger, it crouched low, then shot right into the very center of the camp. Spitting, snarling, yelling its horrid wails, which echoed through the woods, it charged upon the porcupines. Regardless of Unk-Wunk's raised, quilly armor it flew straight at him, tussling, scuffling, spitting and snarling, eager to take away the bone.

“Slap.” The tail of the porcupine, laden with its most deadly quills, landed right between the blazing, yellow eyes of the wildcat, almost blinding it. Then a terrific battle took place; the whirling wildcat, mad with pain, tore about in a wide circle, scattering blackened firebrands in all directions. It looked, for a time, as if a small cyclone had struck the camp. All the while the cat kept up its uncanny screams which struck sudden terror to many a

small wild thing along the trails, sending them cowering back into their dens and hidden coverts. Under the whirling rain of ashes and embers, wise Unk-Wunk and his mate managed to sneak off into the woods unobserved. And at last the wildcat, angry and defeated, slunk away, rubbing its snout, trying to rid itself of the awful quills, spitting and scolding as it went.

But the really tragic part of all this was what followed. Back in the deserted camp had lain one sullen, smouldering firebrand. It might have died out of its own accord in time had it not been disturbed. But the wild scuffle between the wildcat and the porcupine had revived it, tossing it right into a bed of dry leaves and sun-baked ferns.

Out upon the hills the summer drought had been hard ; the pastures lay brown and scorched by the hot sun, while in the woods the underbrush was tinder dry. So the fire took courage, kindled, snapped and crackled, then burst into bright flames and started on its travels. Up the tall stems of giant spruces it ran, leaping across from one feathery top into the next. Behind, it left blackened trunks and below, beds of glowing embers, while all in an instant the for-

est trails became fairly alive with multitudes of wild things, frenzied animals, great and small, all trying to get away from the raging flames. Wildcats, timid cottontails, the black bear and her cubs, they all traveled together hurrying, hurrying on ahead of the fire. Wild deer left their runs, and forgetting their lifelong terror of enemies, leaped off and away. Ahead, far in advance, tore one great, brave buck deer, trying to lead his mate and her fawn to safety. The bear shambled close behind, howling as she ran, snapping back at a biting firebrand which scorched her back. Great snakes cut through the fern jungles like black whips, rushing on ahead of the scorching breath of the destroying flames.

Back of the larger, stronger ones traveled the less fleet of foot, the more timid of the wild things. Among these were the porcupines, Unk-Wunk and his mate. Most of them were headed for Balsam Swamp, for there, instinctively, they knew they would find water, because deep in the swamp lay Black Pond, a never-failing water hole, which had its source in many a mountain stream. If they only could get to the water then they would be safe.

Never in all his lifetime had Unk-Wunk traveled so fast, and they were even then far be-

hind the others; surely they would be caught by the fire. Already, in spite of their protecting quills the porcupines began to feel the scorching breath of the flames close behind them. Old Unk-Wunk was almost spent and deliberately halted right in his tracks. His usually half-shut eyes were strained with anxiety; besides they smarted and stung from the smoke. He was almost tempted to lie right down and give up the awful chase, to defy the cruel thing which was even now scorching and blistering his tired feet. His mate, always following his example, would of course do exactly as he did; in fact, she would have followed him straight back into the flames.

But no, Unk-Wunk was not ready to give up. Instead, grunting, scrambling, hastening as fast as he was able, the porcupine suddenly and deliberately left the trail; it looked almost as if he were going straight into the track of the fire. He managed to reach a certain flat, shelving ledge, which was just ahead of the fire. Then rolling himself into a round ball, he lay down upon the high ledge and rolled right off into space, landing some distance down below upon another ridge of rock. In between the rocky ledges he crept, where the moisture trickled con-

stantly down from above, making it cold and wet; right close to the great rocky ridge he lay and waited. The next instant down tumbled another round, quilly ball from the ledge above. It was his mate; the faithful thing had followed Unk-Wunk, just as he knew she would do. There in the cool, moist-laden rock they clung tight together and went fast asleep, too weary and scorched and terror-stricken to move; and the great fire raged around them, but when it came to the ridge, it leaped right over the spot where they lay, and they were safe.

Most of the more fortunate fleet-footed wild managed to reach Balsam Swamp. There the great snowy owl finally settled, and makes her nest here each year. The eagles built their nest above upon a ledge, and the heron tribe located close by. But Moween, the little black bear and her cubs, went back to the forest and made her den right beneath the ridge where Unk-Wunk and his mate found safety, so that the porcupines and the bears have ever since been near neighbors.

The spot has for many years been known as Porcupine Ridge. Almost any time, if you stray that way, and care for a stiff climb, you can pick up quantities of loose quills near the

spot, and sometimes you may even run across a quilly ball lying right on top of the ledge, or catch one of the numerous porcupine family picking its way leisurely among the rocks. So now you can fully understand why this particular spot has always been called Porcupine Ridge, because it was really settled by none other than old Unk-Wunk and his mate at the time of the great forest fire.



METHUSALEH
THE TYRANT OF BLACK POND

VI

METHUSALEH, THE TYRANT OF BLACK POND

METHUSALEH, the Tyrant, was very old, so old that none of the inhabitants of the pond could have told you his exact age. Like the knights of old he, too, wore armor, which served very well to protect him and turn aside many a stray bullet or dangerous missile aimed in his direction. In fact Methusaleh, the giant snapping turtle of Black Pond, appeared to have led a sort of charmed life, escaping all kinds of dangers in the most lucky manner, and absolutely ruling over all wild things which came near or made their homes in or about the pond.

If the old Tyrant wore knightly armor, he in no other respect resembled the brave knights of ancient days, for by nature he was malicious, sly and wicked. And, if the truth were only known, a very great glutton. Just as soon as the frost left the strata of mud above him where he had wintered, old Methusaleh would rouse himself for action. Quite torpid at first, he

would crawl to some spot where the sun might strike his chilled, mud-caked shell, and gradually thaw out. Soon would commence his eager search for food, and in early spring he made regular hourly trips around the pond, gobbling up the very first young things which had come out of winter quarters, usually small tender frogs. He loved to lie motionless near the surface of the water, sending up pearly air bubbles through his horny snout, waving a flipper idly, just to keep his huge shell afloat, looking precisely like a round-topped rock, for the old fellow's back was rough and so moss-grown that he resembled a stone more than anything living. But all the while his cold wicked-looking eyes, when not shaded by their filmy lids, were quite watchful and always on the alert, and his wrinkled neck was ever in readiness to dart out like a flash to snap up anything which came his way.

Snap, snap, would crash his horny, toothless jaws, closing over one after another of the unsuspecting minnow shoals as they slid by him. As for the catfish, with their terrible lance-like spines, rising just back of their gills, and which every boy who goes fishing dreads more than anything—they never bothered the old Tyrant; his armor protected him so well he feared nothing.

His hard, warty fore legs were so tough and strong they could ward off anything troublesome; besides, they were armed with sharp black claws. Usually, Methusaleh would come upon the catfish from beneath the shoal; a swift snap of his scaly jaws and he had taken a bite from a pearl-white stomach, thus escaping the horn, and discarding every portion of the fish but the choicest morsels. Sometimes, so silently did the old Tyrant approach the shoal from beneath, that he would succeed in snapping several fish even before the leader of the shoal knew what was going on behind him.

Quite as much at home upon the land as in water was old Methusaleh. He could remain beneath water a long time, while in between the rank reeds and grasses alongshore ran his wide flattened trails; regular runways they were. You might readily distinguish where the nimble muskrats ran, because their trails were round and hollow, but when the old Tyrant passed, he cut a wide swath. Fully two feet wide was his great shell. It was blocked off beautifully in diamonds, each diamond being ringed about with layers or rings in the shell, which, if you were expert enough to read, might have given you a clue to his great age.

His horny legs possessed such wonderful strength that he could readily pin down and hold a large muskrat with one fore leg. Usually, when the muskrat colony came across old Methusaleh's fresh trail, they would either leap nimbly over it at a high jump, or back out, making a wide detour to reach their huts, because the water rats always got the worst of it in an encounter with the old Tyrant. Many of them were even forced to swim in lop-sided fashion because of a lost fore paw or hind leg, which had been snapped off by the wicked old turtle.

Nesting time was a pleasant season for Methusaleh. Then he would spend more than half his days foraging among the rank, reedy places, and usually he was smart enough to find the old blue heron's nesting place, no matter how skillfully she might conceal it. Once or twice the old birds had come back and actually found the old Tyrant occupying their nest, surrounded by broken eggshells. Of course they fell upon him and thrashed him badly with their great blue wings, but this made no impression upon the diamond armor of the old fellow, although he looked out well to protect his eyes from the heron's lance-like bill—the only thing which he

had to fear from them. He just doted upon bird's eggs, but more than eggs did he fancy young, tender fledglings.

Who is it that tells us the tortoise is such a slow poke? Just let one of the larger wild creatures of the forest, something which Methusaleh really had cause to fear, get after him, and then you should watch him sprint for the safety of the pond. Putting forth his clumsy, but fearfully strong flippers, with his snaky neck stretching forth to its limit from its wrinkles, his spiky tail held stiff, old Methusaleh would start off on a wild, shambling run, hissing back angrily through his black nose holes as he traveled. His black claws barely touched the earth as he slid over the ground, and it would have taken a very swift runner to keep up with him. Once he reached the water, without pausing to take observations, he would launch himself off into its depths, sinking straight down among the snaky water-weed roots to the bottom of the pond. The pursuer arriving too late at the edge of the water usually went away quite baffled.

Old Ring Neck, the goose, who came each year to Black Pond to rear her wild brood, one season hatched out nine fine goslings, and when

the time came she piloted them to the water for their first swimming lesson. All the way the little ones kept up a timorous "peep, peep, peep," which of course Methusaleh heard plainly enough, for he happened to be right on the edge of the bank sunning himself. Deftly and silently he slid into the water, and from behind a knot of tangled lily roots he watched and laid his plans.

One after another the trusting goslings slipped into the water, their shadows from below looking like floating lily pads, only behind each shadow trailed two pink, webbed feet. Bubbles began to rise from the knot of lily roots below them, but the old goose did not see them; she was too taken up with the young ones. The old Tyrant was making ready to rise.

As soon as the floating shadows of the goslings came just over his hiding place, silently he began to paddle with just one flipper, while his wicked eyes were fixed upon a certain pink foot. Even before the innocent gosling could utter one warning peep, the old Tyrant had yanked it quickly under water, and borne it off among the matted water-weeds. That day the old goose lost two of her brood in the most mysterious manner. How they had gone, or where, she

never found out, and in time Methusaleh managed to steal most of her brood just as he had the young herons. Oh, there was no question about it, the sly old turtle was about the worst Tyrant the pond had ever known.

Now it happened that because the catfish in Black Pond were large and biting unusually well that summer, the two Newton boys, who lived in a lumber camp the other side of the mountain, used often to come there to fish. Frequently they had caught sight of old Methusaleh as he lay sunning himself upon the bank, and never in all their lives had they seen such a giant turtle, and they had often spoken about him in the camp.

"You boys better look out for that old turtle," advised one of the lumbermen as the boys were about starting for the pond; "they're ugly customers, them snapping turtles, when you tackle 'em."

"Guess you boys better not go in swimmin'," spoke grandfather from his corner. "I remember a swim I took in Black Pond once when I was a boy an' say—I left part of one of my toes behind there somewheres; always thought some old snapper got it. We caught a buster there once; managed to hold him, three of us, long enough

to cut a date on his shell, but he was so 'tarnal sassy and strong he got away from us. This might be one of his relatives," chuckled the old man.

The boys were allowed to drive the colt and make a day of it. They fished until afternoon, but at last the fish failed to bite and the gnats bothered them so, they quit fishing and tramped alongshore to look at some snares they had set.

"Say, Dick; hi, come here and look at the track I've struck," called Joe; "believe it's our old friend, the snapping turtle. Yep, here he is, fast asleep. Ain't he just a corker?" The two boys had come upon the old fellow as he lay sunning himself.

"Let's wake him up and have some fun with him," suggested Joe. "I'll get a stout stick; you watch him and see that he don't get away."

Methusaleh had not been asleep, however, so he just raised one cold eye and stared after the boys insolently, as much as to say, "Who's afraid?"

Soon the boys began to prod the old fellow rather too much for his comfort, for there *are* certain vulnerable places upon a turtle, and one of these is his wrinkled neck. The stick bothered him so he began twisting his snaky head about

angrily and snapping at the boys, hissing savagely, finally clinging obstinately to the stick, so that the boys managed to raise him and turn him upon his back where he waved his flippers helplessly, trying in vain to right himself and crawl away.

“Oh, oh, Joe, look! see! why, here’s a date. It says—why, it says ‘1825’; it surely does, see!”

“Great Scott, Dick, it surely does,” cried Joe excitedly, as he read the worn date cut in the turtle’s shell. “Why, it’s grandfather’s old snapper, the one he thinks bit off his toe when he was a boy. This old fellow must be terribly old; he was big when grandfather first saw him and grandfather’s awful old. Oh, if we could only get him back to camp. Tell you what, before anything happens, let us carve a date right under this one. Give me your knife, Dick.” So, together, the boys carved 1913 right under the old date. By prodding the old turtle they made him seize the stick again firmly and together they managed to lift him into their wagon, leaving him helplessly waving his flippers, flat upon his back.

Soon they started for home, but not a minute too soon, for a thunder head was beginning to

travel over the mountain. Before they were half-way home the storm began, and the colt, frightened by the rattle of the thunder in the mountain passes, broke and ran. The old wagon swayed and bounced from side to side and the boys had all they could do to manage the colt. They were glad enough to reach camp, finally, and not until they drove to the shed did they remember the snapping turtle, but to their dismay when they looked for him, he was gone.

“It’s a shame!” exclaimed Dick. “I wanted grandfather to see him. Hold the lantern, Joe; perhaps he’s slid way under the seat.” But they searched in vain, for during their wild ride the old Tyrant had righted himself and slid off the tail end of their wagon.

Away back on the mountain road lay Methusalem, somewhat stunned by his fall. All night he lay there with a piece nicked from his shell. At sunup he was off over the rough road headed for the pond. He crawled along aimlessly at first. Finally reaching a rise in the ground, all at once he lifted his snaky neck, scenting moisture—the pond. Raising himself high upon his great flippers, his horny head stretched out like a racer, he ran scrambling over stones and through matted jungles of weeds.

At last he saw the gleam of the pond lying steel-like and sullen ahead. The hot sun heated his thick shell to furnace heat, scorching his flesh beneath; he longed to plunge into the cooling water. Finally, in desperate haste having reached a high place in the bank, he rolled the remainder of the distance and fell with a loud splash into the pond, straight down into the oozing mud to the bottom, scattering catfish and small fry in all directions.

And there he is still, old Methusaleh, the Tyrant of Black Pond, and no one actually knows his age, for 'tis said *some* turtles have lived a thousand years. But if you ever run across the old Tyrant you may recognize him readily if you have courage and strength enough to turn him over upon his back, for there you will find upon his shell the two dates—1825 and 1913.





MAHUG, THE CHAMPION DIVER

VII

MAHUG, THE CHAMPION DIVER

A STRANGE, uncanny scream rang out over the sullen waters of Black Lake one night in June, and, although there was no human being near the desolate spot to hear the awful cry, it was quite scary enough to startle certain of the wild inhabitants all alongshore. There were others among them, however, who were unafraid; they had heard the same cry before and recognized it. They knew that Mahug, the Great King Loon, and his wild mate had arrived at the lake, where each year they came from warmer climes, to build their hidden nest in some secluded spot among the rushes.

This lonely location had always suited the King Loon so well that no matter how far off he had wintered, he invariably made for Black Lake during nesting time. Mahug, like all his tribe, was a mighty diver and, for water-fowl, he had very fashionable habits, spending a portion of each year near the salt sea, usually camping upon some desolate island, fishing, swimming,

and diving with thousands of other water-fowl, yet never mingling at all familiarly with them, or encouraging acquaintances in a sociable way, because the loon is a very solitary bird. So, when nesting time came, Mahug always went off as far away from the crowd as he possibly could go. Quite frequently he and his mate would fly thousands of miles in order to be exclusive and alone. The old loon was a large, imposing bird, his wing and back feathers of a glossy, metallic black, while his beautiful breast was dazzling, pearly white, the feathers very soft and thick. When Mahug stood erect, at first sight, he appeared to be wearing a dark coat thrown back from a pearl-white waistcoat. His head was beautifully marked, the top of fine, iridescent feathers, the neck ringed about with green and bronze. On the wing, you never would have suspected how very awkward Mahug could be upon his feet. On land he just waddled about in the most ungainly fashion, choosing to fly, usually, rather than walk, because his clumsy webbed feet were not intended for tramping. They were set so far back upon his body that they were of small use to him excepting when he used them for paddles in the water.

Mahug was in his element in water or upon

the wing. And my, how the old King could dive! In fact, the loon family are all noted divers, for they cannot only dive deeper than other birds, but they can also stay under water a long time. So quickly could old Mahug dive, that several times in his life when a hunter had fired at him, even before the bullet touched water, the old King Loon was already deep down in the depths of the lake among the snake-like lily roots, safe.

This June when Mahug and his mate reached the shores of Black Lake, he sent his great cry of triumph abroad, for he was glad to be there. Then he and his mate nested low among the sedges and rested for the night, but the very next morning, even before the fog lifted from the lake, both set about their nest building. Right upon the ground they built it and not very carefully, I am afraid, their main idea being to conceal it cleverly behind a thick curtain of reeds and matted water-weeds, but not so very far from the water. In due time three baby loons pipped their dark green shells, and queer-looking little specimens of birds they were—bare, homely and always hungry.

Although it appeared desolate and lonely enough, still, if one but knew, back in the thick

undergrowth about the lake, hidden by thick jungles of blackberry vines and dark spruces, there were many secret coverts and dens where the wild of the forest made their homes. The lake itself was almost completely surrounded by treacherous, oozy bogs and morasses, so that it was seldom visited by man. For this very reason the wild things felt safe, and the old King Loon had especially selected the spot, for the loon is the wildest of all wild water-fowl.

Few of the other birds cared to meet the loon in battle, because of the mighty strength of his great wings which could soon beat out the life of anything upon which they descended, while his heavy coat of feathers protected their wearer well. So when the loon sent its uncanny scream across the lake, more than one timid, wild thing cowered close to the ground and shook with sudden fear.

As soon as the young loons could tumble over the edge of their comfortless nest among the sedges, they made for the near-by water, and speedily began to imitate their elders, diving far down among the matted water-weeds and chasing minnows and little chunky perch which they would gobble at one mouthful. At first Mahug and his mate watched the young loons,

taking pains to give them diving lessons, and then encouraging them to take short flights, as soon as their wing feathers sprouted. Gradually the old birds left them more to themselves. So it happened one day that one of the young loons waddled forth from the nest and began to follow in the wake of a heron who was leisurely fishing alongshore. The loon mounted upon a large round stone, as he supposed; he did not notice that the stone moved a trifle. It did, and that which the young loon took for a mud-caked stone, was nothing less than a very old, giant snapping turtle, which lay there sunning himself. So old was this particular turtle that his flippers were covered with large scales and his shell looked to be fairly moss-covered. Over the top of the shell waddled the young loon, while the old turtle, without moving its ugly, snake-like head, watched with its hateful beady eyes every movement of the loon. It climbed over the top of the shell and when it came within reach of the turtle's long neck, like a flash it was snapped up by the old fellow. The heron gave a loud "krey, krey" of alarm, but no one heard him, so when the old loons got back to the nest one of the baby loons was missing. They flew out over the water, searching,

screaming loudly, calling in and out among the sedges and tussocks, but of course the young loon never answered their wild calls.

Mahug strongly suspected some one of the muskrat family, so he began watching a colony of them which had pitched their huts along-shore. Even at night, especially if it was moonlight, the old King Loon would skim low over the water, uttering scream after scream as he followed the trails of the muskrats swimming about the lake. If Mahug had caught one of them he would have made short work of it, so furious was he. But somehow the muskrats always escaped, for they kept sentinels upon duty, who always slapped their tails upon the water, at which signal the muskrats always vanished.

Almost before Mahug had forgotten about the disappearance of the first small loon, another one disappeared. This time Mahug was quite certain that the old bald-headed eagle, which lived far above upon a cliff the other side of the lake, had gone off with it. Now there were several young eaglets up there on the cliff and the old birds foraged for them all day long. They took anything they could find upon the shore, especially if it were young, tender and unprotected. Mahug and the old eagle crossed each

other in the air and they had one terrible battle together, but the eagle proved to be more than a match for the loon. The King of the Air had sharp talons and a razor-like beak which tore through the heavy feathers of the loon and bit into his flesh sharply, so at length he had to settle down among the sedges and own himself beaten for once.

The summer moon, round and yellow, came peeping over the tops of the tallest spruces upon the summit of Mount Cushman and lighted a broad path right across Black Lake. Out in the center of the lake the horn-pouts and pickerel were leaping, and over in the shadows on the far shore Mahug, the old loon, screamed and suddenly dove for a fish in the moonlight. All manner of wild things of fur and feathers were stirring. The muskrats were playing, squeaking merrily and chasing each other in and out of their huts and leaving long silvery trails behind them as they swam about. Back in the thickets of rushes dozed one lonely little loon, last of the brood of Mahug. Too young to venture forth upon a moonlight fishing trip, it cuddled down flat, its webbed feet beneath its scantily feathered body, uttering a plaintive little sound whenever it heard the old loons screaming out on the lake.

Because of these little lonely cries, the dark fur-clad stranger who had been feeling its way alongshore, in and out among the tall reeds, paused, erecting its small ears, trying to locate the whereabouts of the sound. Long and lithe of body was the stranger, a full-grown mink. Its dark fur coat mingled well with the shadows, but when a streak of moonlight touched its breast, its pure white breast-plate of fur shone, dazzlingly white. The mink's legs were short, so it crouched low along the ground as it crept nearer and nearer the lonely nest among the reeds.

The next instant it poked its hateful snout through an opening and saw the loon. Already its fetid breath reached the little loon, which gave a startled, whimpering call out into the night. The call had been heard just in time. Like a great black shadow something flew across the strip of moonlight, and with a wild whirl of giant wings the old King Loon charged for the nest. Instantly his fierce eyes sighted the sneaking mink, then down like a perfect avalanche he came, snatching the surprised mink in his beak and soaring out over the water. Somehow the mink managed to free its neck and its sharp teeth met in the pearly breast feathers of

the old loon. For a second it seemed as though Mahug would loosen his hold upon the mink, but instead, uttering a terrific scream of rage and vengeance, which fairly awoke the echoes alongshore, the great bird plunged straight into the water and dove and dove; far down into the muddy depths he sank, never losing his terrible hold upon the mink. Now the mink is quite as much at home in the water as a muskrat. But never had the old King Loon stayed under water so long before. In vain his mate screamed for him alongshore, but only the whippoorwills answered her call. At last, when she had almost given him up, from out the center of the lake arose old Mahug, amid a perfect shower of whirling spray, and he was *alone*. He had been able to stay under water longer than the mink.

Mahug joined his mate, and then, as it was late and the moon was very low, the two great birds gave up their fishing and went back to their nest in the reeds. There in the darkness, with no light but the little flitting fireflies twinkling in and out among the sedges, while the whippoorwills sang a lullaby, they guarded their one nestling through the night. And when the time came to leave Black Lake, *three* loons flew away together.



FIERCE STAR NOSE, THE
BURROWER

VIII

FIERCE STAR NOSE, THE BURROWER

STAR NOSE, the mole, loved best of all very dark places. In fact he spent most of his life underground, so that whenever he did venture abroad into strong sunlight, the glare would nearly blind his tiny, almost concealed eyes. It was on this very account, more than any other, that he preferred to come forth from his underground home about twilight. Now if you chanced to come across Star Nose above ground, at first sight you might judge him to be a very slow-moving, dull-witted creature. In reality he was just about the most fierce, blood-thirsty little fellow on earth or under it. For, if Star Nose had actually been about the size of a lion, instead of a tiny mole, he might readily, with one grasp of teeth or claws, so it is said, tear a great ox asunder. So it was just as well for everybody that he was a mere mole.

Wonderfully fine and soft, beyond words, was his smoke-gray, plush-like coat, and by special

providence the fur of this coat did not grow in just one direction like that of most furred animals. Instead, you might stroke it either way, up or down. For this reason Star Nose was able to travel backward or forward with equal speed. So strong was Star Nose that he could upheave a long section of the hardest earth, no matter if a steam roller had gone over it. Sometimes, when traveling swiftly through one of his subway passages, his velvety coat would become caked with soil; then he would give himself a quick shake which sent it flying from his back, thus cleaning his fur.

It is never well to judge anything by mere appearances, so, although Star Nose had tiny bits of eyes and no visible ears, he was by no means a dullard. Nature, ever helpful, had shown him exactly the way to take care of himself, and, unlike his cousins, the plain little shrews, Star Nose wore upon the tip end of his small pointed snout a pink star. This star was not given him for just an ornament; it helped him wonderfully in finding his way about underground and, besides, he used it in rooting out deep holes, precisely as a pig uses its flattened snout. Star Nose spent most of his life digging, and for this very reason his claws, instead of

curving inward when shut, as do those of most other animals, were arranged in quite a queer fashion—they curved back. This was a great help to him, for he could use them precisely as though they were little spades to toss aside the dirt out of his road. So quickly did he work, that if you but turned your head away for a minute, by the time you looked again Star Nose had dug a hole and was out of sight.

Of all the burrowing tribes which live below ground Star Nose was perhaps the prize digger. He was not content to dig out a burrow for himself a little distance below ground and then sit still in its door as did his neighbors, the gopher family. No, nothing would suit Star Nose but a regular city subway with such straight streets that you wondered how, with his half blindness, he could ever manage to dig them. In addition to this, there were spacious chambers, passages, and regular galleries—long roads which led to his feeding places. You would soon have lost your way in such a maze, but Star Nose never did. He lived in a great bank, and the entrance to his home he had concealed beneath a bush where you would never have seen it, so deftly was it hidden. There was just a little spot raised in the earth which

led straight into a large chamber. Five passages descended from this, connected by galleries lower down, and from this ran many subways and long roads which were worn quite hard and smooth by the passage of old Star Nose, the hermit mole. It was very well for him that these walls were solid, otherwise his whole home might have come tumbling in upon him during a freshet or a storm.

Now the real reason why Star Nose happened to be occupying such a grand apartment alone was this. Last June he had chanced to meet and select for his mate a little silver-coated mole. But one of his plain, shrew mole cousins had upset all his well laid plans. Happening to meet Star Nose and his companion just outside their burrow, he actually tried to persuade her to go off with him. This was entirely too much for Star Nose to stand ; it made him so furiously angry and jealous that he fell upon the impudent shrew, and right there under the home bush they had a dreadful battle. Long and hard they fought there ; they scratched and tore and bit each other's beautiful fur coats until they were in tatters, uttering fierce squeaks of rage, rolling over and over in a deadly grip, each mole quite determined to win little Silver Coat,

while she, poor thing, sat stupidly by, wondering what it all meant. As she sat there shaking gently, old Golden Eyes, the hawk, went sailing overhead, and making one swift lunge downward bore her away. Neither Star Nose nor his antagonist noticed that she was missing; they kept on with their awful fight, biting each other savagely, as they had in the beginning, until finally the shrew had to give up; he was getting the worst of it, and crawled miserably away. Then Star Nose, for the first time remembering what the fight had been about, searched vainly for his little companion. He peered anxiously everywhere, nosing the earth on all sides and searching; then, thinking perhaps she had gone down into the burrow, down he scurried, peering up and down the long roads and galleries, calling softly to her with little muffled squeaks; this because of the earth which sometimes filled his nostrils. In vain he searched. He did not find Silver Coat. Discouraged and worn out on account of his terrific struggles, he gave up, huddled himself in a soft little ball, covered his head with his flat claws, and took a long sleep in the main chamber of his home, hoping to forget his troubles.

All that summer Star Nose lived alone, and so

he became a kind of hermit mole. Of course he was not so very happy; in fact his disposition had become sadly changed. So upset was he by the loss of his little mate that he felt disagreeable with everything which happened to cross his path. Sometimes, so fiercely jealous and full of hate was he, that he would enter the subways of the shrew family when they were away, and when he came across a nest full of baby shrews would bite and kill them viciously, in the meanest way. Finally all the shrews for miles about dreaded the approach of old Star Nose and avoided his trails. Even the sight of his star-tipped snout seen breaking through the earth, on a moonlight night, would put them in a panic and they would scurry away.

Star Nose cared nothing for them. He now laid all his troubles to the shrew tribe and so planned in this unjust way to get even with them.

At last the warm, autumnal sunshine no longer shone down and warmed the bank with its rays. As it grew colder, many of those who lived in underground homes, the fur-coated burrowing tribes, began to make ready their winter quarters. The chipmunks had laid in their stores, the woodchucks, now sleek and

very fat, had gone into their inner chambers and closed up their front and back doors snugly that they might sleep warm all winter. So there were really very few among the wild ones stirring abroad. Colder and bleaker grew the hillside, but thicker, softer, and more elegant became the velvety coat of old Star Nose. He didn't care how cold it grew; in fact he worked all the harder, even beginning new subways deeper down in the ground, which ran far beneath, so the frost could not enter. Star Nose did not close up his doors as had the woodchuck family, for he loved to creep outside and gnaw among the roots and grasses. When the sun came out it warmed his thick fur coat very pleasantly. He took even longer journeys underground, digging frantically in new directions, and he never forgot the fright he had once when in digging he actually broke right through into the hut of Musquash, the muskrat, where it faced the water. It chanced to be vacant, and while he was busy exploring the hut, wondering what kind of cement Musquash used to harden its walls, he heard the slap of a muskrat's tail upon the water. Peering out he saw bubbles rising, then a brown pointed snout, and two indignant eyes looking right at

him. Star Nose tried to back out down a passageway, but he was not quick enough, and even before he could turn about Musquash, with a squeak of rage, had him right beneath his claws. Sly old Star Nose thought his time had come then, but strangely enough, he managed to wriggle his soft body free and had slipped quickly off down a long, narrow passage, too small for the muskrat to follow him. Star Nose realized he had had a narrow escape that time. But, I suspect, if the truth were known, Musquash did not happen to be very hungry, for he had just had a fine meal of lily roots; then, too, Star Nose is not reckoned so great a dainty, for he carries such a disagreeable scent of musk about him, even stronger than that of Musquash himself, 'tis said no wild thing will devour him unless very, very hungry.

After this escape, you may be quite certain Star Nose did not visit the huts of Musquash again. One day Star Nose poked his snout out of a runway of earth which he was raising, and soft white snow feathers came whirling down. He crept forth, and finally the little flakes were sprinkled thickly over his heavy fur coat. He enjoyed the snow although it cut off his food supply above ground. This fact did not worry

him, for deep down below the frost line in the earth, grew a matted network of all kinds of succulent roots, some of them terminating in bunches of little, juicy ground nuts. The teeth of the mole were sharp and fine as needles, so all he had to do was to dig and then feast as he worked, which was pleasant, for he was always coming upon some unexpected dainty ahead of him.

At last the snow fell; deep and soft it covered over the hill with a white, thick blanket. Yet beneath the blanket worked and traveled Star Nose. All winter long his trails ran just beneath the deep snow and in the spring, when the ground became bare once more, one is able to see all these blind trails for himself. The first warm sun shone out at last. It was the beginning of the spring thaws; then the snow blanket upon the hill began to grow each day thinner. Already the great snowy owl had begun to think about a nest, and certain of the fur tribes had ventured to come out, at least upon sunny days, for they were terribly hungry after their long winter sleep.

Right out upon the white snow crust finally crept Star Nose, the mole. At first the glare almost blinded him, he had stayed so long

under ground; besides, he loved night best of all. However, he liked to feel the grateful sun warming his back, so there he lay, a soft, blind, stupid bunch of fur, out in plain sight upon the white snow. A long, slim figure, fur-clad, all in white, excepting the tip of its tail which was brown, came mincing along, picking its way warily over the snow, craning its long neck and peering, first to this side then the other, warily. Over the little snow hummocks it crept, its crafty yellow eyes searching everywhere for food. This was just Kagax, the weasel, wearing his winter coat of white fur, which did not show against the snow, and Kagax was glad, for he was very, very hungry. He spied the little gray heap of fur upon the snow, saw Star Nose huddled there, covering his blinded eyes from the glare, and instantly he pounced upon him, and carried him off.

So this was the end, finally, of Star Nose, the cruel, crafty old hermit mole; such a fierce creature that even his own relatives feared him. And now his fine, secret chambers which he worked so long building, and all his subway passages are vacant, temporarily. But I dare say by spring some of the shrew family will move into his old home.



THE LOYALTY OF
SILVER WING, THE GULL



IX

THE LOYALTY OF SILVER WING, THE GULL

FAR out on the bosom of the wide ocean lay Lonely Island, a small, rock-bound hummock of sand against which the breakers roared and dashed furiously. So wild and barren was the spot that no one visited it, for no human being could live there; nothing throve but rank grasses and stunted beech plum shrubs. Over upon the south side of the island were steep ledges, shelving down into deep water, and this spot alone was never lonely or still, because it was inhabited by thousands of screaming water-fowl.

Down between the cliffs in the lowliest tenements dwelt the snipe and petrel families, the latter seldom at home except during their nesting season. Along the shelf-like places of the rocks above dwelt the gannets, the terns and all other tribes belonging to the gull family. High up in their home crannies the sea birds could always catch the pearly shimmer of the

breaking of an approaching school of herring, even before they reached the line of tossing foam below. Then, swift and sure, they would dart out to meet them. It was wonderful to watch the herring gulls at their fishing, now skimming low over giant, green waves, now sinking into the trough of the sea. Then, with a sudden swift splash of feathery spray, behold the sharp-eyed gull secures the fish and is back again in his own nest upon the cliff. Strangely enough, although the cliff swarmed with other gull families, each cranny bearing its nest looked precisely like another, never did a returning gull make a mistake or intrude upon another family.

For many seasons the gulls and their kindred had nested upon Lonely Island, but one year hunters discovered their retreat, and set up a temporary camp upon the barren sands. They had come to hunt for terns, killing and slaughtering them by hundreds, just for the sake of their beautiful, delicate feathers for which they were to be paid much money. Finally the hunters abandoned the island, leaving behind them many wounded, besides scores of deserted young birds, not out of the pin-feather age, who would finally pine and die alone upon the lonely

ledges, when the parent birds failed to come back to feed them.

For a season, fear and chaos reigned among the gull settlements. Day after day the frightened sea fowl circled wildly about their cliffs, their weird, lonely calls alone breaking the silence, ringing even above the noise of the breakers below them. So many of the colonies were broken up and disturbed that they flew off in detached numbers, perhaps seeking some safer retreat inland.

High up, perched upon one of the topmost crags of Lonely Island, sat all alone a solitary gull. Below, within sight, upon a shelf-like rock, a smaller bird, his mate, sat disconsolately upon the very edge of her dismantled nest, unwilling to tear herself away from two featherless young gulls, her babies, who would never stretch out their scrawny necks to her for food again. They were limp and dead—the hunters had wantonly thrown down loose rocks and broken up the nest.

Although Silver Wing, the old leader of the gull tribe, felt badly enough over the loss of the little gulls, he was much older and wiser than his mourning mate ; he had lived through many seasons and similar tragic events in his life. So

even while his mate sat mourning, his sharp eyes had been fixed upon a certain wave crest out beyond the breaker line.

With a sudden swift rush of his wide wings he launched himself from the cliff; a wild plunge and he rose from the great wave bearing a glistening herring in his talons. With a graceful sweeping detour, he swerved in toward the cliff, and finally landed close beside his mate, where he dropped the fish beside her with a little crooning, plaintive cry, which meant, of course, "Take this nice herring which I have brought you, and be comforted, little mate." With another swirl of his wings off he flew to fish for another herring before the school could get away.

In spite of the efforts of Silver Wing, who tried for days to rouse his mate and tempt her to fly off over the water upon fishing trips, she continued to linger around the old nest until he became almost discouraged. Finally he determined to leave Lonely Island, start off and found a new home, as many of his kindred had already done after the invasion of the cruel hunters. Accordingly, Silver Wing, in some manner known to his tribe, induced his companion to accompany him upon a long flight. One fine

day, in company with others of the colony which decided to follow their old leader, they started for the far distant coast.

Occasionally they would halt upon some small, lonely island, but, as it happened, none of them proved to be exactly suited to the gulls' needs. The islands were often flat and sterile, mere strips of white sand and beech grass, with no rocky ledges suitable for nest building. So on and on flew the gulls, with heavy wings. Sometimes they would sight what appeared to be a small island, from which would trail long streamers of smoke. When the gulls came up close to these islands they would be terrified by strange, uncanny hootings and tootings. Besides, whenever they gained courage to hover over these strange, floating islands, they always proved to be filled with people, creatures like the hunters. One thing they discovered, was that by following in the wake of the floating islands they always found plenty to eat, strange food of all kinds upon which they eagerly fed.

For a sea bird the worst storms at sea have small terror. The petrels, or "Mother Cary's Chickens," as the sailors call these birds, love best, it is said, to ride upon the very crest of a giant wave during a wild storm, and the gulls

are equally at home upon the bosom of the ocean. It is only when straying birds are adrift, seeking a new country, and are driven ahead of a storm toward the coast, that they are occasionally overcome by the elements. So it happened that a great storm arose and struck the colony of fleeing gulls, sweeping them inland. On their great wide wings they flew ahead of the gale, on and ever on through the blackness of the inky night, until at last the poor wind-driven things finally sighted an object big and bright, beckoning, winking to them out of the darkness; and toward this the gulls, and a host of other smaller straying birds who were swept ahead of the storm, made their way. Hopefully they neared the bright beacon. The next rough, whirling gale caught them and dashed them pitilessly against the lantern of the lighthouse, and down again upon the blackness of the cruel rocks beneath them.

Fortunately, Silver Wing, the brave, giant gull, whose broad wings were still strong and unwearied, had penetrated the inky darkness with his sharp eyes. He had seen the danger ahead, and just at the right instant had swerved aside, with powerful wing strokes, just clearing the great lamp, which had almost blinded his eyes.

So he with his mate, who invariably followed his lead, were swept coastward ahead of the mighty gale, but to safety.

When morning broke, Silver Wing, and his mate found themselves upon the bank of a great river. Here were plenty of other gulls, but of a strange, new tribe. The river was bordered with mud flats, which at low tide formed splendid feeding grounds. Crawfish, and shoals of small, shining fish abounded. But, to tell the truth, neither the old gull nor his mate was very happy or contented with the river bank. They had known only the wild life of their lonely ocean island and missed the booming breakers along the cliffs, the companionship of the sea bird colonies, the terns, the gannets, and the little roving petrels. Besides, this new, almost tame tribe of gulls was vastly different in other respects. Silver Wing and his mate felt they could never mix with these small, brownish plumaged birds who fought and wrangled among themselves, who were content to brood for hours in the black mud of the river flats. More than once during their stay, Silver Wing had to finally thrash one of these bold, foolhardy brown gulls for presuming to pay attention to his own mate, and at last he came to hate the very spot, becoming

wildly jealous of every brown gull who crossed him in any way.

He and his mate determined to go off and seek a new home, for it was almost nesting time again, and Silver Wing realized the importance of settling as soon as possible. So, one day he gave the starting signal, and after hovering triumphantly overhead above the gormandizing brown tribe upon the mud flats beneath them, screaming back a loud, lonely challenge, off they flew.

For many days they flew along the shores of the Sound, now skimming low to dip their gray wings in the blue waves, flirting the spray high in silvery showers, or feeding along the beaches for little tender mussels or soft-shell clams, and playing tag with the funny little sandpipers who ran across the sands, and scattering them just for fun. At last they reached a desolate, rocky strip of coast, and after much flying about they finally settled upon a convenient cliff beneath which stretched a long line of sandy beach, while out beyond tumbled their dear, familiar breakers. Down below the cliff were jagged, brown rocks, over which trailed long, emerald green and brown sea kelp, where the water seeped in and out with the tides, leaving in the shallow places shoals of little fish, sea anemones,

and starfish. Through these the gulls would pick their way daintily, with their pink, webbed feet, searching out the barnacles which clung to the rocks, pecking at tiny, sheltering shells where lurked sweet morsels to be had for the cracking.

The busy season came at last, however, and the two young gulls had to be fed, so all day long Silver Wing and his mate foraged and fished for them. They brought young, tender herring which the small gulls, as they grew older, would swallow at one gulp. Occasionally they carried shell-fish to the nest; these they would prepare for the young gulls by dropping them upon the rocks beneath and cracking the shells.

One day the mother gull chanced to be long away. Already had Silver Wing traveled alone, so many times back and forth from the nest to the water with food for the little gulls, that he began to think his mate was trying to leave all the work for him, and he actually grew indignant at the very thought of such an imposition. He resolved to hunt up his lazy mate and make her do her share. With wide, swift strokes of his gray wings he started off, scanning with his sharp eyes every flashing wing to make sure it was not his mate. In vain

he flew far and wide, even across to the other beach, more than a mile away ; still no trace of her could he find.

Finally he began to fly low over the beach, searching in and out among the little coves. At last he heard a shrill cry ; plaintive and beseeching, and it belonged to his mate. With great, wide sweeps he soon reached her side. She was down upon the sandy beach and seemed to be fluttering wildly. As Silver Wing drew near he saw her trouble ; she had been caught and was being firmly held by one foot, by nothing less than a giant clam.

Meantime, slowly but surely the tide was coming in ; each wave that broke upon shore swirled just a little closer to his trapped mate. Soon she must be caught by the tide, and entrapped as she was, held as if in a vise by the giant shell-fish, she would surely drown.

At first Silver Wing rose in the air in bewilderment, calling wildly for his mate to join him, beating up and down the beach, hovering over her, then rising high in the air and screaming his commands. Still she did not follow him. At last the great gull seemed to have sized up the situation, and like a plummet he fell from the air and began a savage attack upon the hard

shell of the clam. With his strong beak he hammered, while his mate continued to beat her wings helplessly upon the sand, screaming wildly.

Smash, smash, rang the beak of the gull, while in swirled the creeping tide, each time a little nearer the struggling gulls. It broke now in little foamy ripples close beside them. If the shell-fish failed to loosen its hold, the tide would soon cover them all. Down like a chisel came the strong beak of Silver Wing, while with his great webbed, sinewy feet he held the shell of the clam firmly, delivering his blows now always upon the one spot.

Another blow, still another. Would the great shell-fish never loosen its grip? Another ringing, cracking blow, and just as a larger wave came creeping stealthily inshore and broke over them, the giant clam loosened its awful hold upon the foot of the little mother gull, and the two birds with long, plaintive cries mounted into the free air. Dipping low just once over the incoming tide to snatch a herring from the waves in their beaks, away they flew swiftly back to the little gulls, who were impatiently awaiting their coming back upon the lonely ledges, far above the breakers.



HOW KOSKOMENOS,
THE KINGFISHER, WON HIS BELT

X

HOW KOS-KO-MENOS, THE KINGFISHER, WON HIS BELT

HEAPS of strange happenings in Nature go unexplained. Some say 'tis because the wonderful old Indian story tellers who knew many wood secrets are gone. Long ago the little Indian children loved to squat beside some smouldering lodge fire and listen to these tales—these hidden secrets told of their little brothers of the wood. They were told how Moo-wee-suk, the racoon, always wore five rings about his plummy tail, why the red-winged blackbird is branded with two spots of living fire on its jetty wings, why the woodpecker carries a bright splash of fresh blood upon his crest, and also why the badger is always a kind of joke, just because of his war-paint markings. Some tales remain untold and one of them is how Kos-ko-menos, the great kingfisher, won his beautiful blue belt.

Dee-dee-askh, the blue jay, had wintered in the deep pine forests instead of flying south one

autumn. Wild berries had been plentiful that year and the greedy jay hated to leave behind such good feasting, so he remained behind the migrating birds. He was glad though when the long, cold months of "The Snow Shoes" passed, for he was tired of feeding upon pine cone seeds, or anything which he could pick up in the forest. The snow had begun to melt away from the south sides of the hills and the mountain brooks roared tremendously, breaking free from their strong ice prisons, making pleasant music through the valleys and in the rocky passes of the mountains.

The crows were colonizing, coming out from their retreats in the thick pine coverts, where they had huddled all winter to keep from freezing. They barked hoarsely to each other. The jay screamed loudly, trying to drown their cries and break up their council. Dee-dee-askh is not popular with the wood people, for he has always had the bad reputation of being a thief. He loves to watch smaller birds at their nest building and rob them of their eggs or the very young birds; no wonder he is unpopular.

Dee-dee-askh filled the woods with his harsh, strident screams and swooped down the valley, following Otter Creek until he reached a spot

where it broadens. One side is a steep bank, and across towers the mountain, green with thick spruces to its summit. This forest was where the jay, and his mate decided to build their nest. Year after year they had located there and Dee-dee-askh had managed to rid himself of very near neighbors, fighting them savagely if they intruded upon his privacy, so remained a sort of monarch. He loved to conceal himself in some thick bush and frighten more timid birds, or little furry things.

“Kee-oo, Kee-oo,” would scream the jay, imitating to perfection the harsh scream of a hawk; then how he would chuckle to himself to see the frightened things scurry, or fly off to hide themselves in the thick woods.

One day Kos-ko-menos himself, King of all the Kingfisher tribes, came journeying down the creek; he was looking for a new building site, for, as it happened, the old fishing pool where he had lived the season before was too shallow, owing to the drought. So the fish had all gone up-stream seeking deeper pools. It was important that the kingfisher should locate near good fishing, because soon there would be young birds to feed.

Taking six little, flapping short flights, then a

glide, on came Kos-ko-menos, followed closely by his smaller mate. His beautiful crimson eyes searched up and down the creek as he flew, trying to decide upon the best building site. But when he came to the clay bank, he knew he need search no further; nothing could be better. Without even waiting to rest themselves, Kos-ko-menos and his mate soon began to make the dirt fly in all directions as they excavated deeply for their new home. Round and smooth was their doorway, just large enough to admit one kingfisher at a time. About half-way up the side of the bank it was placed, and ran fully six feet, straight into the clay. Into a little hollow at the very end, they threw a few fish bones and loose leaves, then the beautiful eggs were laid, which in time would become three goggle-eyed, frowsy-headed little kingfishers, very ugly, but handsome to their parents, of course.

Kos-ko-menos darted back and forth, flashing like a great blue jewel, as he took up his sentinel-like position upon a stake in the water, where he could peer straight down into the deep water for fish. He preened his feathers, shaking out the clinging clay, and gave loud screams, he felt so happy about the nest.

“Kerrr-ik-r-r-r,” he screamed triumphantly, making a terrific sound, just exactly like that of a harsh, wooden toy buzzer, only louder, if possible. The very mountains rang with his cry. Then all the furry tribes knew for certain that Kos-ko-menos had come to live in that spot. Many of them disliked the idea very much; they dreaded his harsh scream which made the more timid jump and disturbed their babies, it was such a horrid cry. The kingfisher has always been considered a kind of outcast among other birds. They imagine that he is uncanny; that is, because of his wonderful skill at fishing, and because he can dart into the water quickly and stay under a long time, so they think perhaps he is himself more of a fish than a bird. They cannot understand why he does not walk properly, but has a way of waddling which is very funny because his legs are very short and placed far back upon his body. His great bushy crest makes him appear almost top-heavy and his appearance is ungainly.

I think, however, that the real reason why he is shunned by some birds, and shabbily treated is because they are, secretly, in their hearts, jealous of the beautiful feathers which Kos-ko-

menos wears, because no matter how homely his body may be, it is beautifully clothed. Upon the top of his head he wears a long, high crest of rich, dark green, which color extends down his neck, and each little feather is flecked with spots of blue of a wonderful hue. Violet and blue is his coat, his tail a deep indigo blue. Over each crimson eye and just beneath it, is a cunning dot of black. He wears a thick, feathered waistcoat of yellowish white, and his beak is jet black.

Once more Kos-ko-menos screamed his wooden-buzzer cry. Then like a flash he darted straight into the deepest part of the pool, and before the spray had fallen he was out again with a fine, wriggling fish. As he was about to kill the fish upon a near-by stone, a blue, flashing fury came dashing out of the woods with a harsh, angry scream, and Dee-dee-askh landed upon the crest of the kingfisher. They had a terrific battle; back and forth, back and forth over the creek they flew, showers of light blue feathers barred with black and white fell, and a few speckled, green ones. Mrs. Kingfisher poked her head curiously forth from the bank to see what all the screaming meant. At last the jay flew back to the woods with a portion of his proud crest

gone, and the kingfisher, smoothing down his ruffled feathers, gave another scream and went back to his fishing. 'Tis said that certain of the wood creatures who witnessed the conquering of the jay chuckled and grunted with joy, remembering sundry robberies of nests and burrows by Dee-dee-askh, the cruel one. After this they began to have a little more regard for Kos-komenos, the kingfisher; but this was just the *beginning* of things.

Musquash, the muskrat, lived under the bank of the creek. Many of the little muskrats used to stray out upon the bank right in plain sight of an old pirate eagle which lived on the mountain, and which used to come sailing down the creek, watching to swoop down upon anything alive which he saw below.

Musquash himself was old and almost blind; he could not detect the eagle when he soared high above. One after another the young ones were stolen by the old pirate, old Bald Head. This had happened *before* the kingfisher came to live in the bank. One day Musquash himself ventured up the bank after roots; he did not see old Bald Head high above, watching him.

But Kos-komenos sat upon his sentinel post watching. He thought he saw a faint white

dot in the sky—the flashing of the sun upon the bald head of the old pirate.

“Khr-r-r-r-rrr,” screamed the kingfisher defiantly, as the old pirate was hovering his wings, making ready to drop down upon poor, old blind Musquash. Before he reached earth, Musquash, heeding the warning scream of Kos-ko-menos, was paddling straight for his hut under water.

The kingfisher was glad to see the old sky pirate outwitted, and so glad to save Musquash, that he dove down after the fish he had been watching, caught it, and all the time he was eating the fish he kept up a little glad, chattering chuckle, deep down inside. Many had seen how the kingfisher had saved old Musquash, and finally they all came to depend upon him to warn them when dangers came that way. Kos-ko-menos never failed them.

The jay family raised three young, impudent jays. Already the young ones in the kingfishers' nest had stuck their fuzzy heads out of the hole in the bank, and both Dee-dee-askh and Kos-ko-menos had all they could do to get food enough for their families. One day the jay caught a fine catfish, and he thought to himself that he might as well gobble it all up him-

self instead of taking it home. He flew quickly to a near-by stone to beat the catfish, lest it sting him with its sharp horn. As he was about to swallow the fish whole, he heard an angry scream from his home. His mate had been watching him all the time. Again came the cry, which sounded not unlike the sharp striking of metal, then a loud, shrill scream, "Cray-cray, cray!" Dee-dee-askh saw a whirl of light blue feathers approaching. In his haste to bolt the fish whole, lest his mate take it from him, he choked and choked and swallowed. But alas, greedy fellow! The fish was too large for just one mouthful, and he began to flutter helplessly upon the rock, while the tail of the catfish protruded from his mouth.

Kos-ko-menos saw it all and chuckled to himself, but he had a kind heart. Flying straight to the jay, he gave one sharp, strong tug at the tail of the catfish, and the greedy jay was saved. Some say the *real* reason the kingfisher seized the catfish was, because he wished to gobble it down himself—but that point is not certain. Kos-ko-menos had certainly saved his neighbor from choking to death, which showed he bore no grudge against the jay. Of course all the wood people saw the kind act of Kos-ko-menos,

and it made a deep impression upon them ; they marveled, because the jay had been so rude to the kingfisher. It was nice of him to forget his mean treatment, they thought.

Down deep in a certain pool of the creek lived old Kenozha, the pickerel, dreaded and feared for years by all the inhabitants of the banks who swam in the water, or fished for a living. The sly old fellow had a cruel way of coming up just beneath them when they were in water, and before they knew it he had nipped off a toe, a tail, or even a head. The turtles had lost claws, the giant bullfrog, leader of the spring choruses, was minus a foot, and even the wary old loon had lost a toe. Kos-ko-menos, who knew all about the old pickerel and his crafty ways, determined to rid the pool of him, and took to watching for him, as many another had before him ; the jay, the loon, and the hawks had all fished for Kenozha, but this is why they had failed : the old fellow had seen their *shadows* upon the water. So, wise Kos-ko-menos, the kingfisher, knew better than to let his shadow fall upon the water, but took good care to perch upon his watch tower at just the right angle so that he should throw no reflection, and the green, goggle eyes of the pickerel could not spy

him. There was great excitement along the banks of the creek one day, when Kos-ko-menos arose from the creek bearing the struggling old pickerel in his strong beak, and much interest as they watched him subdue and beat Kenozha until he could struggle no longer. All were glad ; even Dee-dee-askh came screaming out of the forest, while grunts and chuckles of approval might be heard from many a retreat, where hid the wood brothers. And 'tis said that even a soft, murmuring song of praise stirred among the whispering pines up aloft.

Soon after that time, the watchful ones noticed the beginning of a faint blue band across the breast feathers of the kingfisher. Gradually it deepened and widened, finally becoming a well defined belt right across the pale yellow waistcoat of the kingfisher.

And ever since that time Kos-ko-menos and all his tribe after him continue to wear this badge of honor, this belt of azure hue, like belted knights of old. The kingfisher is no longer an outcast among the little brothers of the wood.



THE WIT OF CLOWN-FACE
THE BADGER



XI

THE WIT OF CLOWN-FACE, THE BADGER

IT was full of the moon at the seashore, and the young field corn close by was ripe; each pearly kernel almost bursting with its milky sweet contents. What a time for a corn roast or frolic; so thought all the boys along that particular strip of beach, which shelved its way down from a dense forest of spruce and hemlock to the edge of the water.

There were others, the furry things, the four-footed people of the woods, who knew just as well as the boys what good times were to be had at that particular season, and they made their plans accordingly. The boys had visited the beach that same night, roasted their corn and oysters, and left long before. The shore was apparently quite deserted. The ebbing tide was stealing out softly, scraping and rasping upon the little round pebbles, sending little golden shells tinkling musically against each other, as the water lapped and filtered through them.

Overhead shone the great yellow moon, making a wide silvery path straight out across the water. One wondered where the road ended.

Back from the beach in the dark woods, plenty of life was now stirring, for the nocturnal prowlers were waking up, although the small windows of the scattered farmhouses were dark and still. Above the noise of the ebb tide the katydids were heard contradicting each other tirelessly, hoarsely, "katy-did, katy-didn't." Crickets shrilled in the long, coarse beach grass; a distant screech-owl set up an occasional shivery wail. Then, from amid the thickets of scrub oak and barberry bushes, came another call—an unusual cry, not often heard, which began with a tremulous whimper, ceased, then went on; and was finally taken up and answered by another similar, whimpering cry, and still another, from different parts of the woods. The first call had been given forth by an old hermit racoon, or a "little brother of the bear." He was something of a leader, and was sending out a summons for all his relatives to join him in a moonlight frolic.

The old hermit scrambled hastily down from his home tree, which happened to be the deserted nest of a great owl. Plainly the old hermit

would soon outgrow this borrowed home, for when sweet corn is in the milk, and the little salt, wild oysters are a-plenty down on the beach, then the racoon became so very fat that he could barely waddle. Of course he felt obliged to fatten himself in late summer, for already he was making ready for his all winter's sleep and his long, long season of fasting.

Having reached the ground, the hermit sent out another call—the rallying cry of his tribe; for dearly the racoon loves to feast and frolic in company and was becoming impatient to start off. The only reason, I suspect, why the old hermit lived absolutely alone, at this time, was merely because there was absolutely not an inch of spare room for another racoon in the nest.

To his joy, his kindred had responded, and soon from out of the shadowy places stole one waddling form, then another, until finally five racoons were in the party. Then with the hermit leading them, Indian file, they all made their way leisurely to the distant corn field. In and out among the tall rows of nodding, whispering blades they stole, and standing upon their little black hind feet, they would reach up the corn stalk, and deftly pull down a plump ear with their forepaws, which they used as cleverly

as hands. They never made the mistake of selecting blackened, mildewed ears; these and the shriveled, dwarfed ears they tossed disdainfully aside, and my! what havoc those coons did make in the corn field that night! They would strip off the silky green husks and eat out only the full, milky kernels, smearing their black noses and paws liberally with the juice which they would hasten to rinse off at the first water they found.

There were others in the field that night, but they never interfered with one another; there was plenty of corn for all. The woodchuck family also enjoyed sweet corn in the milk, and tempted by the moonlight, they had left their burrow to feast. Off beyond, skirting the edges of the tall corn, skulked a swift, fleeting shadow—Redbrush, the fox, bound for the chicken coops, or hoping to find a covey of quail or partridges sleeping in the edge of the wheat field. Back in a little creek which bubbled in places, broadening out into still, deep haunts for trout and pickerel, the moonlight found its way. Here and there you might discover the huts of the muskrats, mostly deserted, for the inhabitants were all abroad. You might see their brown heads above water, follow the wake of their silvery

trails, and hear their playful squeaks as they chased each other from village to village. Oh, there were squeaks a-plenty that night all through the deep clover and among the tall grain, while beneath roofs fast asleep and dreaming were the children.

For the most part, the wild things appeared to live together in peace and harmony; occasionally bitter feelings were felt when the racoons thrust their black paws into a woodpecker's nest and robbed it of eggs. Then, too, old Mrs. Diamond-back, the turtle, would deposit her eggs in a spot which she fondly imagined very secret, failing utterly to look up above, where, from a limb, the greenish inquisitive eyes of the hermit watched her every movement. Taking it altogether, there was little to disturb their happy life then. Times were going to change and very soon in an unexpected fashion.

Clown-face, the badger, had been routed out of his distant home nest on the far side of the mountain by an enemy. Because he enjoyed roving, he took up the life of a tramp and made a trip to the seashore, for he dearly loved the little black mussels which he remembered having once found there. As it happened, badgers were not common in that section of the country;

perhaps one of them had never happened to venture over upon that side of the mountain, even, so none of the wild things had ever encountered this queer looking fellow.

Queer looking he certainly was, and the funniest thing about him was that the sly old fellow, who had often looked at himself in some still pool, knew exactly how odd he appeared to others. He had wit enough to use this knowledge for his own purposes. Once seen, the clown face of the badger was not soon forgotten by other animals. He soon discovered that when a stranger appeared suddenly on the trail whom he did not care to meet, all he had to do usually was to stand still, and stare and stare at the intruder, who invariably would back out or side-step from the trail, leaving it clear to the badger; why, I will explain.

In the first place, the badger was just about as broad as he was long. His thick fur coat, which was flowing and parted in the middle of his back, nearly reaching the ground, looked for all the world as if he carried a goatskin rug across his back. His legs were short and he appeared not unlike a great, hairy caterpillar as he waddled along. But his fore feet carried two tremendously long hooked claws which, if cor-

nered, he would use in fight, for his courage was very great. His head was broad and furry with short ears. The strangest thing about the badger was his face, which was marked exactly like a funny clown. Although his back was gray—one may still hear the saying, "gray as a badger"—his head and neck were of short dark brown fur, while like a dash of white paint ran a mark of snowy fur from the bridge of his nose, back to the nape of his neck. On either cheek was another dash of white, reaching from the tops of his ears to the corners of his mouth. Below this was marked out a little crescent of white, set off by a stripe of dark fur. Altogether, the badger always appeared to be wearing a kind of painted disguise. No wonder then, when he stared straight at any animal who had never seen such a funny face, that it turned and ran in an opposite direction. Such was the make-up of Clown-face, the badger. Even now he was making his way in the moonlight to new grounds, where he would be seen and feared. Clown-face was in search of a deserted burrow into which he could crawl and rest, for he was tired. He soon came to the deserted home of the woodchuck family. Into this he crept, taking care to crawl in and turn

around, so as to leave his painted face right in the doorway; then he went to sleep.

After the hermit racoon and his friends had feasted upon sweet corn, they left the corn field, and took a stroll down the beach. The tide was out. In among the wet pebbles scurried droves of little green crabs, while clinging to rocks were small, salt wild oysters, which racoons dearly love and which, for this reason, are sometimes called "coon oysters," so greedily do the racoons search for them. It was a funny sight to see the five fat racoons strolling along the beach by moonlight. When they came to a bunch of oysters, down they would plump and, taking the oyster in their hind feet, they would deftly crack it open against a stone and dabble it up and down in the water with their little black hands, washing it thoroughly. For the racoon, you know, from its habit of washing its food, is often called "Lotor, the washer." There the little company of coons stayed until turn of tide, when they went back over the wet sand, treading upon their toes and leaving their almost human five-fingered little tracks all along the beach, as they went back to the forest again.

The first to reach home that night was the woodchuck family. They were quite ready for

sleep, in the fine burrow which they had spent days in digging. The bushes rustled as they swished them aside, and the rustling they made awakened the badger who had been dozing in the entrance of the burrow. Just as Dame Woodchuck came to her door, out popped the funny painted face of the badger right into her very eyes. It grunted at her fiercely and she hastily backed away with a cry of terror. Never had the woodchucks seen anything like the badger. They waited for it to come out, but it stayed right in the burrow, so the old woodchuck made bold to go to the *rear* entrance, and squeezing her fat body flat she entered, only to be met by the awful clown-like face again. She hastily backed out. All night the badger remained in possession of the woodchuck's burrow and for days after, until finally they left it to him and began to dig a new burrow some distance away from the old one.

The next night all the wild kindred were again astir. The woodchucks had spent most of the day upon their new burrow. They still had to add chambers ; it was at least a home, so off they went foraging with the others, for corn is not always in the milk and it is not always moonlight. That night the old hermit racoon

had planned to go back into the forest to dig wake-robin roots. Often, after a great feast, the coons enjoy a diet of these roots, perhaps eating them as a sort of medicine, because they are hot and as fiery as pepper, although, with all their biting, peppery taste, the coons devour them greedily. In Indian file, off started the coons, and soon succeeded in finding a bed of the coveted wake-robin roots which they began to tear up hastily.

Clown-face, the badger, was also abroad, hunting field-mice or any young, tender creature which he might track. Creeping through the matted jungles of undergrowth, he soon discovered the racoons digging up roots. Thinking to have some fun at their expense and perhaps drive them away from something which he might eat, suddenly he stuck his painted clown-like face through a dark opening of the bushes and grunted at them. The old hermit himself spied the horrible face first, and so frightened was he that without pausing to finish the root in his black paws, he tore off through the bushes with all the others following him. The hermit did not stop running until he reached his home tree, for never had he seen or dreamed of such a face as that which had peered out at him from the woods.

In time Clown-face, the badger, by using his wits managed to have things pretty much his own way there in the forest. He found where the young quail nested. He foraged in the unprotected huts of the muskrats and stole their young. He ate the turtles' eggs and made himself a great nuisance to all. The only living thing which Clown-face, the badger, dreads now is the hedgehog, for, being almost as ugly and strange appearing as the badger, it does not fear him or turn aside. So between the two is a bitter feud, because Clown-face often ventures to devour the hedgehog's rations. Some time I know there is going to be a terrific encounter between them in the woods, because the stupid-appearing hedgehog never troubles himself to get out of the badger's way, but lies down in his very path, quite unconcernedly. One day Clown-face is going to get to the limit of his patience and rebel. Then I wonder which one will come off the better, the badger or the hedgehog?

Meantime, the wit of Clown-face, the badger, serves him very well. He still roams over the forest trails and along the beach unmolested by the wild.



THE SUGAR CAMP
ON LONE MOUNTAIN



XII

THE SUGAR CAMP ON LONE MOUNTAIN

IT was nearing March, but deep snow still covered the hills up in the North country, though there were, as yet, scant signs of spring; not even a bird was to be seen, excepting occasionally a solitary crow. When the sun shone out in the middle of the day, the brown fence tops began to show above the white drifts down in the clearings. By night the freezing cold returned; everything froze up solid, and upon the snow crusts which were thick and glossy it was just the best kind of coasting.

There were other important things for boys to think about besides fun and coasting; it was just the right sort of weather to begin making maple sugar. For when it freezes hard, then thaws, the sap will run; so up near the lumber camps, where Dick and Joe lived, the sugar season was commencing. Several miles back of the camps upon the side of a wild mountain, rightly called Lone Mountain, grew a great for-

est of maples. The spot was too far away for most of the campers to bother about sugar making, but Dick and Joe did not mind distances, and as all the spending money which the boys had they were expected to earn for themselves, they were only too glad to have the privilege of tapping the maples on Lone Mountain. Even before the sap began to flow, they had actually counted over the money they would earn with their sugar and had really spent almost every cent.

They whittled out hundreds of fine ash spalls to run the sap, then borrowed every crock and pail their mother could spare from the camp to hold it, besides two great black iron kettles, which they would set over an arch built of large flat stones, where they would boil their syrup. After packing provisions, and all their outfit upon a sledge, off they started for Lone Mountain, a day's journey from camp.

Wild and lonely enough was Lone Mountain, a kind of scary spot at best for two boys to camp out alone, but they were not at all afraid, for they were used to wild places. Having lived so long in the great spruce forests they felt quite at home. Several years before, they had found the remains of an old sugar house standing in the

maple grove on the mountain below a great, overhanging crag. Here they would live, and boil the sap just outside the shack. After tapping their trees, they drove in the spills, hanging the buckets beneath. As fast as the sap collected they had to boil it, or it would soon sour and be wasted. So, as you can well imagine, both boys were kept very busy, collecting sap, keeping up fires under the great iron kettles, watching the boiling sugar, and testing it upon the snow to find out when it was boiled enough. When night came they were very tired, but they kept at their sugar making as long as the sap continued to run from the trees. They had been on Lone Mountain over a week. With the continued thawings and freezing, the sap kept on running, but the boys were glad, for it meant a fine lot of sugar and they were greatly elated over their good luck. They would carry back more sugar to camp than ever before.

“If we can only have two days more like to-day’s run of sap, we’d make a pile of money this year,” spoke Dick happily; “we could buy two dandy overcoats, and have something toward our new sugaring outfit, that we talked with father about buying.”

“Yep, I know; great!” replied Joe, as he

ladled out a great waxy spoonful of amber sugar upon a pan of snow, and after it had cooled a bit divided it with Dick.

“Bully, ain’t it?” offered Dick, cleaning off the spoon. “Best we ever made—fine and white; it’ll fetch top prices. But say, we could make it still better if we only had a new up-to-date outfit. We’ve got to get it somehow, I guess, even if we don’t buy new coats this year; guess our old ones will go another year; we ain’t dudes.”

Sure enough, that day to the delight of the boys, another thaw came and the sap ran as it never had done before and kept them jumping well to save it all.

“One of us will have to stay awake and tend fires and watch, to-night. We can’t finish up anyhow, and we can’t afford to waste all this sap. I’ll boil all night,” said Dick, tucking the embers in around the great kettle.

“You won’t tend alone. If you stay up all night I shall too,” said Joe, stoutly. “Guess we’re partners on this sugar making, ain’t we?”

“Of course. Tell you what we will do: I’ll tend till midnight, while you sleep, then you can work the rest of the night while I sleep,”

suggested Dick. To which his brother agreed willingly.

The boys ate their supper, boiling their eggs in sap, and finishing up with brown bread spread thickly with soft, new maple sugar. And oh, how fine it tasted to the two tired boys. Soon Joe was fast asleep in the shack upon his fragrant bed of balsam boughs, rolled up in an old patchwork quilt, his mother had made him take, for it always grows bitterly cold in the mountains before morning. Dick grinned to himself, as he worked alone and heard Joe's tired snores coming from the shack, and he made up his mind to let him sleep after midnight and get well rested. He kept very busy himself tending the bubbling syrup in both kettles and bringing fire-wood. It was somewhat lonely off up there in the mountain, now there was no one to talk to, thought Joe to himself. The wind sighed and whined in the tops of the spruces. Occasionally, he heard a mysterious crack upon the snow crusts, off in the woods, where some hoof or paw broke through. Finally, an old owl began its lonely hoot above the shack somewhere, and once he heard a long, whimpering yell, far across the valley. He knew what that meant; a lynx was abroad, venturing down into the clearings

after a sheep, perhaps. Joe looked back into the shack rather longingly after the lynx yelled ; he was almost tempted to awaken Dick, but decided, unselfishly, not to.

At last, long after midnight, Joe himself began to feel extremely worn out and sleepy. A great stillness had settled over everything ; even the wind seemed to soothe him to drowsiness, while the sap bubbled and blubbered softly and monotonously in the iron kettles. In spite of all he could do, Joe's tired eyes closed together, and, untended, the fires under the black kettles burned lower and lower. Out beyond the camp, breaking through the snow crusts, unheard, stole a huge, black, shambling figure, closely followed by two smaller ones. A great black mother bear, and her two very young cubs, and she was heading them straight for the boys' sugar camp. The cubs were so young they had difficulty in keeping up with their mother, for they were tired. It had been a long distance down from the den, but the mother bear did not spare them, and kept nosing them along impatiently when they halted along the trail. Now if there is one thing on earth a bear loves even more than honey, it is maple sugar. The scent of the boiling syrup arose even above the woodsy odors,

and delicious enough it seemed to the old bear ; she was eager to reach the camp.

At last the little trio came out into a small clearing surrounding the shack. The old bear halted, warily, but all was now silent. Inside the shack lay one boy fast asleep, rolled in his patchwork quilt, while half leaning against a tree slept another. The sugar had ceased to bubble and wallop in the great kettles, for the fires were almost out. Between the kettles shuffled the old bear, followed by the cubs, whimpering wearily and crossly. The old bear arose upon her hind feet snuffing and grunting, but never offering to disturb the sleeping boys ; all she cared about now, was to find maple sugar. She was of monstrous size, and when she finally entered the shack, she completely filled up the rude doorway with her huge form. She nosed about, but did not find the stored sugar, so out she shambled, and cautiously approaching a great, black kettle, she sniffed long and deliciously at its contents, blowing out the whitened ashes in clouds from the blackened embers with her breath. The cubs meantime seated themselves close by and watched her movements curiously.

Then the old bear did a very foolish thing. So eager was she to get a taste of the sugar in

the kettle that she reached in with one great furry paw, burning it severely. She immediately lost her head, and in her rage upset the whole kettle full of hot syrup all over herself. *Then* there was something doing! With a terrific howl of pain and sudden terror, which made such a racket that the mountains fairly echoed back her cries, the old bear tore off into the woods in a perfect frenzy of agony, her heavy coat soaked with hot syrup, which burned its way deeper and deeper at every step. Without heeding the cubs, or what became of them, she ran wildly on, only seeking water where she might cool her burning flesh. As soon as Dick and Joe heard the first yell of the bear, they were wide awake, you may be sure. Joe saw the old bear just as she disappeared in the woods, and scared almost out of his wits he shouted :

“Hi, Dick, bears! Look! There goes one big as a house, and see, there’s another one,” pointing out one helpless, whimpering little cub which had been left behind by the old bear in her madness.

“Where?” inquired Dick, skeptically, as he appeared from inside the shack rubbing his eyes sleepily. “What, *that thing*? It couldn’t hurt

a fly; it's just a baby. I hope you ain't afraid of a bear cub that size."

"Well, I didn't say I was," replied Joe, rather touchily. "You just ought to have seen the big one I saw, and heard its yells. It was awful. It turned over most a whole kettle of hot syrup. Look!" and Joe pointed to the overturned kettle.

"No wonder it yelled," grinned Dick; "though come to think, it got pretty well scalded; that's why it yelled so, I guess. And say, it won't come back here right off either, I'll bet. But look, he's wasted most a whole kettle full of good syrup—meddling old thing. Say, why in creation didn't you wake a fellow up?"

"Oh, well, I guess, come to think of it, I must have been asleep. I seem to remember just closing my eyes once or twice," confessed Joe.

"Great Scott! I should think you did. Let a bear come into camp and not wake you up; ha! ha!" jeered Dick. "But look here; we're *in* something, if we did lose some sugar; we've got a bear cub, and my, ain't he a dandy?"

"Look, look, Dick! He's sitting up and rubbing his eyes with his paw and crying, just like a little kid. My, ain't he the funniest little fellow?" spoke Joe delightedly watching the cub,

and both boys had great fun over their new pet, which they meant to take back with them to the lumber camps.

“Sugaring all finished to-day,” commented Dick, as the sun rose over the tops of the tall spruces, and they ate their breakfast, sharing their bacon rinds with the bear cub, which had seemed to take to them at once.

“Won’t we surprise the folks when we lug all this sugar home, and a bear cub too?” spoke Joe. “Say, look at his head, Dick; see, he’s got a funny mark from his nose to the back of his ears; I’ll bet when he sheds his woolly, baby fur, it’ll be a regular white streak right across his face. I heard Indian Pete tell once about a white-faced bear; they’re awful rare.”

“Hope the folks will let us keep this fellow in camp,” said Joe. “He’ll make a fine pet, and Indian Pete’ll help us to teach him tricks, perhaps.”

“Say, what if the old bear comes back for her cub? She’ll be awful mad at us, and I guess we better make tracks, and leave here soon as we can,” suggested Dick, peering back into the thick woods, almost expecting to see the old bear making for them.

“Huh, I ain’t afraid; she’s probably so badly

burned, she won't think of anything else for a while. Just the same, we'll break camp," replied Joe.

So back to camp they went in triumph, their sugar packed on the sledge, and on top of the load sat the little, furry bear cub, which they had already named Whitey. Because Whitey was such a cunning little fellow, he was accepted in camp, and soon became a perfect pet. He was full of mischief, however, and could never be left within reach of the sugar crocks. He broke and filched eggs, and even gnawed whole sides of bacon. To make up for his mischief, he acquired many taking tricks. He soon learned to stand on his head, and beg for lumps of maple sugar, and was beginning to take a few clumsy, capering steps, which Indian Pete called dancing.

Evil days came, and as Whitey grew older he became cross, and would often bite and scratch roughly. So finally, the boys were told they would have to part with their pet.

Now, as good luck would have it, an opportunity came to sell the bear to a man who dealt in trained animals. Dick and Joe went sadly to work, and built for him a rough coop with slats in front. In this coop Whitey was crated, and the following day he would be taken away. For

the last time, the boys visited him in his crate, which had been set behind the camp, in the edge of the woods, so that his whines might not disturb the camp through the night. Early the next morning before sunup, the team would take him away. The boys threw in lumps of sugar and things which their pet fancied most, and after shaking his rough paw, sadly they said good-bye to him, for Whitey would be gone before they were astir in the morning.

That very night, when everybody was asleep, from far across the valley, traveled a great, shambling black bear. She had come from far over the other side of Lone Mountain. She shuffled her way to the boys' sugar camp first. In and out of the desolate shack she stole, stopped to sniff at the blackened firebrands, nosed anxiously about the spot where her cub had rested so long ago, when one cub had followed her back to the den, and the other had been lost. Then, wheeling suddenly about, she took an almost worn-out, indistinct trail, which led into the forest; and starting into a broken canter, she headed toward the lumber camps.

Thus it happened when the team halted to pick up the wooden crate, and carry the bear cub to town, there was no cub to be found. All

that remained was a heap of broken, splintered boards. The boys soon spied out the small tracks of Whitey, and then Indian Pete pointed out two other great, broad marks—the tracks of a full-grown bear. The mother bear had never forgotten her cub; she had come back for it at last, and just in the nick of time. The boys were secretly glad that their pet had regained his freedom. Surely, in the great, green spruce forests, where the red raspberries grew thick and sweet on the mountainsides, and the wild honey may be taken any day, Whitey would be far, far happier, than capering and doing tricks to amuse a curious crowd.

Years after, a white-faced bear boldly approached the boys' sugar camp, and was seen by them, but they did not fear him, for they were almost certain it must be their old pet, Whitey, who gained his freedom long before.



THE PERIL OF THE SNOWY
EGRETS

XIII

THE PERIL OF THE SNOWY EGRETS

IN the heart of a certain dense cypress swamp, in the middle South, lies a pond of water, which is fed by many streams, winding and percolating their sluggish courses through the vast swamp lands. It is lonely and wild there. This is what makes the place such a safe retreat for the birds. Each spring they come back to this spot, the wood ducks, the bitterns, the teal, and the little blue heron family. Their flashing, brilliant plumage lights up the sombre darkness of the jungles, while their strident cries make the spot less lonely. Perhaps the little blue herons are the very noisiest of all. Wading in the water on their stilt-like legs, searching for minnows or crawfish, they are almost sure to have a quarrel, if one of them gets a prize fish, and then what a clamor they can make. Away off in the swamp it sounds almost as if they were screaming back and forth, "Tell you what, tell you what," over and over again.

One spring day after most of the birds had arrived at the pond, peering skyward from their fishing, they saw two specks approaching. Gradually the specks drew nearer and nearer, and finally, when they reached the precise spot where they meant to settle, straight down, like plummetts, they fell, right into the swamp. Then all the other birds set up a noisy, clamorous welcome, for the great Snowy Egrets, the most important newcomers of the season, had arrived. Beautiful beyond description is the great Snowy Egret. Snow white is its exquisite plumage, that wherever it appears it lights up the dark, gloomy swamps and jungles with its purity. The beak and legs of the egret are black, its eyes a golden yellow, while from its back trails a wonderful long spray of soft, snowy plumes, which float behind like a white robe as it flies. These beautiful plumes are longer on the mother bird, and at nesting time she uses them to cover the baby egrets.

Having found a choice place in a stunted cypress, the egrets soon set about their nest building, choosing a site about forty feet above the swamp. Very affectionate and loving with each other are the egrets; whenever the male bird leaves the cypress, on his return, he makes

such a fuss over his mate, greeting her as joyfully and tenderly as though he had been gone a week. In fact, the egrets are gentle, trusting birds, and have few enemies among the wild. The father egret does most of the hard work, too, for he gathers all the twigs for the nest, which the mother egret carefully builds. Taking turns, the egrets sit upon the four eggs, and in eighteen days the little, homely, featherless egrets appear, naked except for a few tufts of down. This makes them very tender, and the mother egret covers them over during the intense heat of the day with her soft trailing plumes.

At daybreak the father egret would fly off, returning with a crop or pouch full of tiny fish, and while the mother was away getting her own breakfast, the young egrets were fed. Clinging to the edge of the nest, father egret would stretch forth his long, snowy neck over the little ones. And one by one he would produce the fish which he had brought home, only partially swallowed, and which the little egrets would gobble up quickly. It took such a quantity of food to satisfy the baby egrets, that the old birds made many, many trips across the swamp to the water during the day.

Now, although the desolate swamp country appeared deserted enough, excepting for its bird and wild life, back on the edges of the vast wilderness, Italian families had located, to begin clearing up the jungles of wild timber, and drain the swamp lands. So this is how it happened that Tony and Papita, his small sister, came to live in the swamps. Not a very pleasant place to live in, but their father and mother were there, so they did not mind; besides, as Tony and his sister were too young to work, they had fine times exploring together. In the swamps they found plenty of wild, new things, wonderful flowers, and long mosses, and queer toadstools. Tony came across an old dugout one day, abandoned by some swamper, and then the children began to go upon voyages of discovery. They paddled up and down the narrow, sluggish streams which wound through the swamp, and each day they would venture a little farther. They were never afraid of the loneliness, or any wild thing they saw. Often a great snake would slide heavily off a log into the water, as they stole by in the old boat. At first Papita would shiver, but Tony always laughed at her fears, and now she had become quite as brave at swamp sights as her brother.

One day Tony almost thought himself lost; they found themselves in such a dense, dark spot. At first there seemed no way of getting through.

"We best turn back now, Tony," suggested Papita; "it's the end, I think."

"No, see, the light comes through, soon—we go on a little further." Tony paddled on, manfully, and they leaned low to avoid the long, snake-like vines of bamboo. Sure enough, a few tugs of the paddles brought them right through the dark place, out into such a wonderful, new spot, they were glad they had kept on. At first, such a noise began around them, as the old boat shot through into the light, that Tony and Papita were almost afraid, until they found out what it all meant. Hawks whistled sharply overhead, and the air was filled with water-fowl, which arose from a little island in the middle of the pond they had entered. Wings flapped, there were harsh croaks on all sides, while the blue herons set up their "Tell you what, tell you what," cry.

The children stared about them in astonishment, and, as they stared, a strange thing happened. Right out of the skies, so it first appeared to Tony, a wonderful, snowy form came flying, trailing behind it, what appeared to the

children, a beautiful white robe. Its great snowy wings were wide spread, and it finally settled in a dark cypress, where its wonderful plumes shone out so pure and white that the children were both awed by the strange sight. Now there was one thing only, which they knew about, and which they imagined bore a faint resemblance to this white winged thing: their mother treasured an illuminated card with a pictured angel.

“Say, Tony,” almost whispered Papita, “perhaps it is an *angel*.”

“No, no,” replied more sensible Tony. “It’s a real bird, but a *kind* of angel bird perhaps.”

Thus did Tony and his little sister catch their first sight of the great Snowy Egret. After that, having once found their way to its haunts, they often came to the hidden bayou, to watch the egrets at their nest building, taking care never to alarm them. At first, the egrets, which are shy, did not like the children so near, especially in nesting time. Often, the male egret would hover over the old dugout, calling down impatiently, “Cruk, cruk, cruk,” which meant plainly enough, “Go away, go away, go away.” But the children came so often, that the egrets, even the blue heron tribes, and other water-fowl,

became accustomed to the old boat, and did not mind its coming and going.

It was an exciting time for the children when the little egrets came; then Tony and Papita came every day. They watched the feeding of the babies and heard the old egret call, "Cruk, cruk, cruk" on his way back to the nest with his pouch full of little fish. Soon the little egrets raised themselves in the nest and called back eagerly, "Kek, kek, kek," which Tony said meant, "More, more, more."

And now comes the sad part of my story, but it must be told, because every boy and girl should learn about the peril of the beautiful Snowy Egret, and know what happened to these wonderful "angel birds" which Tony and Papita so loved and watched.

It was Tony who learned about it first, so he told Papita, one night before they went to sleep, up aloft in their shack, where the stars had a way of peeping in through the board roof and winking at them.

"Those men with guns, Papita, I don't like," complained Tony bitterly. "They shoot all our birds in the swamp. Once I see *long, white feathers*. They're angel bird feathers, I think, only not white—no, all black with swamp

mire. I see plenty and *some were red*, Papita, red with blood. One man, the big one, he laugh and say, 'Plenty money for these fine plumes.' "

"What for they get those angel bird feathers, Tony?" asked Papita anxiously.

"Huh, I hear grand ladies buy white, angel feathers, to make them fine," replied Tony. "But *no one* could ever be so beautiful as our angel birds."

"Oh, Tony, what if these bad men shoot *our* angel birds?" and Papita's voice trembled.

"I know, but wait; to-morrow we go at sunup, quick, to the bird place," spoke Tony.

As soon as they neared the bird island the next morning, they knew some one had broken through the jungles, for the vines were torn aside and the birds, still disturbed, were circling and screaming wildly about the pond. The first thing they looked for, was the egrets' nest. Perched upon the edge of the nest were the baby egrets alone, screaming shrilly, "Kek, kek, kek," calling vainly now for their parents, and to be fed; they wanted their breakfast.

Tony and Papita waited some time, but in vain; the father and mother egret did not come back to the nest.

“They don’t come back ever, the big angel birds; but we go and look for them, Papita. You see, the little ones are so hungry; they die if we don’t feed them.” The children paddled up and down the swamp, searching everywhere, and finally found the old egrets—all that the plume hunters had left—just the two, snowy bodies, from which the beautiful, long aigrette plumes had been roughly torn.

“Oh, oh, what *can* we do? The little ones wait; they so hungry,” spoke Papita, her eyes full of tears.

“Papita, I tell you what—we, you and I, *we* be father and mother now to these little angel birds. We bring the little fish, until they be large enough to get for themselves. But first, we hide them, these little ones.”

“Oh, yes, yes, so no hunters find them, Tony,” replied Papita, seizing her paddle eagerly.

Back the children went to the cypress tree, where the little egrets had been left alone to starve, and after much hard work, between them, they finally took the birds in the dugout, to the little, lonely island, where they placed them in an abandoned heron’s nest, over which they managed to build a rude sort of cage of long

bamboos to keep the birds from falling out. They had an old fishing net in the boat, and succeeded in scooping up enough fish from the edges of the pond, to keep the little egrets from starving. The little things were so very hungry they fed readily, showing no fear, but setting up a constant worrying "Kuk, kuk, kuk" for more. Finally it was time to go home, but the children visited the young egrets each day, faithfully. After feeding them, they would leave a supply of fish on the edge of the nest. Soon the young egrets had grown accustomed to the children, and became so tame, that they would allow their heads to be scratched gently by Papita. One of the birds, the largest of the brood, would perch upon Tony's shoulder sometimes, to his great joy. This was a very happy time for the children, and they never wearied watching their pets grow. The bamboo cage was finally taken away, and the egrets were able to fish for themselves. By early November, they were almost full grown and Tony and Papita knew that they would not stay upon the island much longer, for, already many of the other water-fowl had migrated to South America, or other warmer climes.

One night a light frost visited the swamp, and

the next morning the children came to the island, perhaps for the last time. They saw that the egrets were showing much excitement, flying back and forth and screaming back to each other wildly, circling low over the children's heads, then darting up again, curving their long, graceful necks.

"Look, Papita! They like to tell us something—hear, they try to speak; they don't hear me even when I call; see." Vainly Tony tried to call the egrets to him. Usually, the large bird would come to him willingly enough, but now, as they watched the big fellow, he began to rise straight into the air, mounting ever higher and higher, and they could hear him calling back for the others to follow. Then, with wide-spread wings the others mounted into the air, and then they all sailed off together to find the warm, safe shelter of another retreat, farther south. Tony and Papita, away down below them in the swamp, stood hand in hand and watched them, until they were lost to sight.

"They are gone from us, Tony," spoke Papita, sadly.

"Yes, sister, but wait; another year they will come back to us, I know; for the birds do al-

ways find the way back again. And think—we *saved* them, those little ones, which was a brave thing to do. Now they are beautiful big angel birds and their white plumes are safe.”



MOGUL, LAST BUFFALO
OF THE HERD



XIV

MOGUL, LAST BUFFALO OF THE HERD

THE great plains lay hot and parched at sunset. Silent and lonely it was, too, for the drought of weeks had been so terrific, that even the usually sociable little prairie dogs stayed in their holes to escape the scorching heat. At sunset they were beginning to liven up, and all other wild things, which had stayed in the cool places were coming out. Between the dried, stunted clumps of mesquite trees, and the sagebrush patches, certain dark shadows skulked; the coyotes were starting off upon their nightly raids. The little prairie chickens had gone to roost, but the hooting of the small, brown-barred owls, which lived in the earth burrows, had begun among the sage-brush thickets.

A coyote, stealing in and out along its trail, suddenly squatted upon its lean haunches, resting upon the raised dirt of a dog village. From this site it peered curiously off, into the distance, for its bleary, green eyes saw something moving

against the sky-line. What the coyote saw was this: A great, black hulking moving object, was stumbling its way westward, following the last, golden glow of the sunset, and, as the creature watched, it made out another, smaller figure, following close beside the large one. Then, after satisfying its curiosity, the coyote raised its lean snout, and howled dismally, from sheer disappointment, for that which he hoped might be game had turned out to be nothing but just an old, sick or wounded buffalo, followed by her little calf. The sight so disgusted the half-starved coyote, that it started in an opposite direction, on a slinking run, for with all its meanness it will not pursue another which is wounded.

The huge, mother buffalo stumbled bravely on and on; she was very weak, for she still carried an Indian's arrow in her side. How she had managed to escape, at all, with her calf was a wonder. The herd had stampeded, and somehow, after they had gone, she found herself wounded, alone with her calf. Lowing to the little fellow, she encouraged it to follow her and all day they had journeyed over the long, hot trail. If she could only manage to find water, then she could wallow, and perhaps her stinging

wound would heal. Occasionally she stumbled, almost breaking her leg as she plunged into the hole of some dog village, which her glazing old eyes had not seen.

Suddenly she raised her great, shaggy head, and roared out a low cry of triumph ; she had scented water. She urged on the weary, tottering steps of her calf, pushing him on ahead with her nose, lowing gently and affectionately, encouraging it to hold out a little longer, for soon they would come to the beautiful, longed-for water hole.

They entered a small canyon between two notches, and right down in a hollow, a short distance off, the little, new moon, flashed a gleam across the water. As soon as they had quenched their dreadful thirst, the mother dropped down heavily among the undergrowth, and the little calf, already refreshed, stepped in and out of the thickets, cropping contentedly among the tender cactus sprouts and arrow weed. Mogul, the calf, perhaps wondered, the next morning as the sun beat its hot way into the canyon, why his mother did not rise, as usual, from her all-night resting place, and low, for him to follow her. After a time he understood, for such is the keen instinct of the wild ; she would *never* rise again. Thus

did Mogul, the calf buffalo, begin his lonely life. His brave mother had just managed to lead him into the safe canyon for water, and then had died.

Mogul was an unusually fine, large calf, for his age. He was full of courage and daring, but he stayed safe in the canyon, where the forage was plenty, and water never failed him, for a long while, every day growing bigger and stronger. When spring came, and the passes began to grow bright with gay-colored flowers, the water holes bubbled, and prairie chickens called their "Coos, coos, coos" from the thickets; then Mogul began to look about and long for companionship, for he was lonely. He noticed the happy frolics of the jack-rabbits, with approving, gentle eyes. Contentedly chewing his cud, he would watch the prairie dogs romping happily in and out of the doors of their villages. A bark from the watching sentinel would sound an alarm note, and, like a flash, they would vanish into a hundred holes. With the sprouting of his small, sharp black horns, came a sudden restlessness to Mogul. He remembered the herd, so he determined to leave the canyon and find them.

He had never encountered any real danger in his life, as yet, never heard the whine of an Indian's arrow, or sighted a painted, brown body

topped off with painted feathers, astride a loping pony. Once on the open plains he would soon find out about all these things for himself. Through the mouth of the sheltering canyon traveled Mogul, so full of courage and life, that he gamboled and leaped playfully by the way; he would shake his huge, top-heavy head, and rip up great tufts of sage-brush with his sharp horns. Occasionally he halted, bellowing fiercely and stamping. A yellow, diamond-back rattlesnake presumed to coil and rattle at him impudently, right in his path. Knowing no fear, Mogul charged at it, sending it spinning high in the air, then stamping it out beneath his shining hoofs.

The sun baked down mercilessly upon his heavy coat, out on the open plain, where there was no shelter. Almost, he wished himself back in the canyon. Gnats bit right through his tough hide; he swung his great head incessantly and angrily, lashing them with his tail; still they clung, biting and stinging his flesh until blood flowed. The plains stretched on ahead with no companionship in sight. Poor, lonely Mogul! For days he had not tasted water. If he could but find a water hole, he would wallow and rid himself of the stinging pests. That

night he reached a small, brackish pool of water, and dropping into a moist place, Mogul rolled about until he had made a fine hole about as long and wide as himself. Into this the water gradually oozed, and with a snort of joy, Mogul rolled his tormented body about, coating himself well with the wet clay which cured the biting stings. Early next morning a stray buffalo cow came to the pool; she was young and very pleasing, and Mogul's joy seemed complete, for he had found company. That night the pair caught up with the great herd and joined it.

Black King, leader of the great herd, had never been crossed, but as soon as Mogul appeared he disapproved of him, because of his jealous disposition, for the old leader noticed that Mogul was fully as large as himself, and even more powerful—a born leader. The Black King was growing old; he feared this stranger might become a favorite with the herd, which might desert him, as they frequently did, for a younger leader. Whenever Mogul met Black King, the latter would charge savagely, bellowing mightily, and throwing up great showers of earth with his hoofs and horns, to frighten Mogul. Then the eyes of Mogul would suddenly grow red with inner fires, and he would

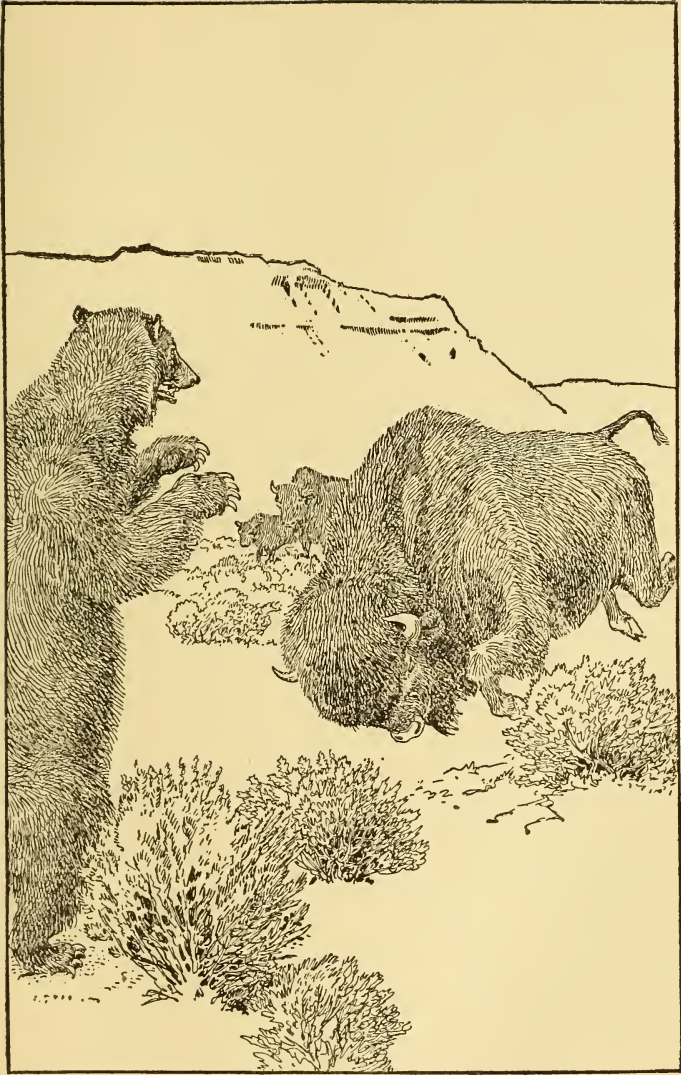
charge wildly at Black King. One day, somewhat to his surprise, the old leader actually backed off and away from Mogul, bellowing and calling his followers after him. Thus Mogul won a position of respect from the herd, a greater part of which took to following his leadership, others remaining loyal to Black King.

Grazing near the edge of a rocky canyon with a favorite cow and her calf one day, Mogul almost met his match in "Ezekiel," as the plainsmen had named the great grizzly bear—the terror of the Rockies. Ezekiel, full grown, and with four young cubs back in a den of the mountains, with their mother, was seeking food. The young cubs needed fresh meat. Afar off, peering over the edges of the canyon, Ezekiel had sighted the three grazing figures of the buffaloes. Buffalo calf meat he intended to carry back to the waiting cubs. In and out crept the shambling figure of the great bear, taking care to keep low down among the underbrush, making for the site nearest the little calf, which was feeding somewhat apart from its mother's side.

With a snort, Mogul raised his heavy head; instantly he sighted the great hulking thing which was making its way toward the calf.

With a wild bellow of rage, he charged straight for the waving underbrush, and as he came on, Ezekiel, the terrible one, rose upon his great haunches and boldly faced Mogul, for the grizzly is absolute monarch of the plains, fearing no foe. For a moment Mogul, the fearless, was daunted by the sight of the tremendous creature facing him. With outstretched paws armed with great, razor-like claws, its wide, red mouth bared to show its cruel teeth, the bear came on with savage, thunder-like growls. It was unfortunate, however, that Ezekiel did not travel on all fours, for, seeing his advantage, the buffalo lowered its shaggy head, lunged straight for the unprotected stomach of the bear, and before it could even seize him in its terrible grasp, he had pinned its great body to earth, pressing his sharp horns, and making the bear howl for mercy. Then, after goring the bear well, without waiting to see whether Ezekiel was able to get up or not, Mogul bellowed forth a summons; the cow and calf joined him, and they tore off, to join the herd.

One day, as the herd was contentedly grazing together, Mogul and his followers upon a small plateau, which ended in a high cliff, across the plains loped a band of hunting Indians.



THE BUFFALO LOWERED HIS SHAGGY HEAD, LUNGED STRAIGHT FOR THE UNPROTECTED STOMACH OF THE BEAR.



Once the herd becomes frightened, it usually starts a stampede. One buffalo cow snorted in alarm, then the whole herd suddenly lost their heads, which was just what the Indians had planned. Wheeling about, Mogul led his herd straight away from the cliff, off, toward a canyon. Alas for Black King! The Indians were behind him, and completely losing his head, he charged across the plateau, heading for the cliff. Like thunder was the roar of the thousands of hoofs, which fairly shook the earth as they madly ran, following their leader to certain destruction. Roaring, bellowing, raising the dust in clouds, they ran. Too late! When at the very verge of the cliff Black King saw their peril, he swerved, bravely trying to turn back. Like an avalanche the herd rushed upon him, a great brown, waving mass of heads and flashing hoofs, and over the cliff they fell. When the Indians went back to their village they held a festival and gave the great "dance of the war shield" to celebrate their fine hunt. They had enough buffalo meat to feed all the dogs of the village, and skins enough to keep the squaws busy curing them for many moons. Afterward they had a great feast, and there was joy in every tepee of the village.

Mogul led his herd for many years, and a mighty herd it became, spreading in thousands, far across the plain. The mighty thunder of its passing might be heard very far off, and the dust, when it moved, arose on high until it almost reached the sky. Gradually, but surely, the great herd began to diminish and thin out. Once a terrific drought killed many of them. For days and weeks they journeyed, the vast herd, seeking old, well-remembered buffalo wallows, over the trails, but when reached they were found dried out. The buffalo pawed and dug deeply into the arid, salt-caked holes for moisture, but none came. They died by thousands. Afterward the settlers came across stacks of their bleaching bones, lying just where they had fallen. So, weakened and hungry, for the drought had killed off the scant herbage, they traveled on, ever westward. Merciless Indians drove them farther on, and hunters of the plains, who coveted their valuable skins, made after them. Finally the great herd, all that was left of it, split, as by common consent, and chose a younger leader for their thinning ranks. One day Mogul, the king of the old herd, found himself deserted, and left to wander alone upon the great plains. In vain

he tried to follow the herd, but they soon out-distanced him, and he came to realize that his company was not wanted longer. For many years he wandered, always alone, occasionally seeing scattered remnants of the great herd, but gradually they dropped off, either killed by Indians or dying from starvation. Somehow, old Mogul managed to escape the wolves, the skulking coyotes, the mountain lions and the Indians. One day, utterly lonely, he sighted a vast herd. At first he thought them buffalo, but on coming up with them he saw they were long-horned, red cattle, which had now taken the place of his lost tribe. Because he longed for company, Mogul joined the red cattle, and they did not molest him or drive him away.

Now, out on a reservation, somewhere in the West, herding with the long-horned cattle of the plains, grazes Mogul, the old buffalo leader. His teeth are broken, but he still crops at the grass, and when he lifts his head, you may see that he has but one horn ; he lost the other in a fierce battle for his life with a grizzly. Sometimes the old buffalo lifts his great, shaggy head, and gazes straight out across the broad plains with his old, dim eyes and lows deeply and longingly, perhaps remembering his lost tribe,

and other days. When the cowboys round up the cattle, they often point out to strangers from the East, a solitary old buffalo, grazing, usually somewhat apart from the cattle, on the edge of the herd, and then they say, not without some pride, "See that old buffalo out there. He was once leader of a well-known, powerful tribe, but he is old, just how old we cannot say, and he's now the last great buffalo left of a mighty herd."



THE LAST PANTHER
ON CUSHMAN RANGE

XV

THE LAST PANTHER ON CUSHMAN RANGE

TOM and Ned Manning lived upon a farm, in Northern Vermont. The Manning home was in a beautiful valley, and all about, as far as the eye could see, ranged the Green Mountains; the range which towered over this valley was called Cushman.

The boys were quite elated one day, when their father told them he would have to send them over the mountain to a far-off lumber camp, upon a very important errand. This meant a two days' holiday for them, no school, and plenty of adventure in the woods.

"We'll start early," called Tom, to his brother, already splitting his next morning's kindlings. "And if we have good luck, we can reach camp early in the afternoon. Snow-shoeing will be dandy, and say, we can just about skee down on the crusts, going down."

"That's so; it's going to be a bully trip," replied Ned, "and mother's sure to put us up a big feed. Say, somehow mother don't like the

idea of us two going alone over the mountain. Guess it's because the Eatons have been losing their sheep, and now Strongs have lost a young calf. Some think there's something big and wild around loose on the mountain somewhere—a painter, or something like that.”

“Joe Strong said their calf *never strayed* away,” replied Tom, “but father thinks it did. He thinks dogs got the sheep, anyway, and he says nowadays there ain't anything big enough on the mountains, to carry off such a big creature as a calf—hasn't been, for years. Anyhow, I ain't a coward. Say, let's ask to take grandfather's gun with us,” suggested Ned.

The boys went to bed early that night, so as to get started by sunup. The morning was keen, cold and sparkly, and the sun shone out upon the snow crusts as it came peeping over the pointed spruces, on the summit of the mountain, and made them sparkle as if sprinkled with trillions of diamonds. They stowed away the ample lunch which their mother had put up, and Tom shouldered the old gun, while Ned carried the gum pole. They had decided to halt at a certain grove of giant spruces, half-way up Cushman, which they meant to visit for gum. The pole was long enough to reach into a tall

tree, and at the end was a sharp knife, just beneath this a small cup, so that when the gum was chipped off, instead of falling down and being lost beneath, among the pine needles, it dropped right into the cup.

Soon the boys left the steep hilly pastures, the foot-hills of the mountains, behind them, and began climbing the side of old Cushman.

"Look ahead, Ned ; we're right in range of some dandy old spruces," called back Tom, who forged on ahead with the gun. "See, just beyond that ledge, up there, we'll halt and get our gum, then we can soon climb up top and have our lunch. It won't take us long to go down. Come on ; we must have that gum ; it'll be good picking."

"Say, guess that ledge ahead must be Vulture Cliff ; looks like we're kind of off the main trail. We never strike off quite so far east as this, do we ?" asked Ned, halting to look up at the great black, snow-capped crag, which towered above them, jutting far out over the valley. They halted just below, and visited some giant spruces which, to their joy, yielded such a fine harvest of gum, that they hated to leave the grove.

"We got to be making tracks now, I guess, Ned. Come on."

Just then Ned chipped off a splendid lump of amber gum from his tree, and still higher up he saw several large nuggets clinging temptingly to the brown spruce trunk. As prime gum would readily fetch a dollar a pound, these Vermont boys, to whom pocket money was rare, were reluctant to leave it behind.

Tom insisted upon their going on. "We've got to go on right off, Ned. But say, we'll come up on purpose, some time, when we don't have to go over the mountain."

Soon they were directly beneath the grim shadow of Vulture Cliff; it would be a stiff climb to go around it, and this they found they must do to reach the summit of the mountain. They had halted to get breath, a second, when Tom spied a queer-looking object lying just beneath the crag upon the snow, and went to investigate.

"What is it?" called down Ned, curiously.

"Come on down and see!" shouted back Tom, and soon the two boys were staring at their find—a great bone, the knuckle joint of a cow, having the hoof still attached. The bone had been gnawed, but was *still fresh*.

"Great Scott! What do you think of that?" exclaimed Tom, excitedly. "It's surely some

young creature's hoof, and whatever was gnawing, it surely dropped it down from the ledge above, I believe." The boys had sudden misgivings. What could it have been?

"Say, Tom, must have been something big, and fierce, and hungry, to carry off a big bone like that. Perhaps the bone belonged to that heifer that was lost," suggested Ned.

"Might have," commented Tom, taking in the situation, which suggested to him the idea of getting away from the lonely spot as soon as possible. Besides, they discovered that much time had already been taken up with their gumming, more than they had meant to take, and now, to their dismay, they discovered suddenly that the sun had disappeared; great clouds were swiftly gathering about them, while down below, in the valley, already the snow whirled thickly. A swift storm had arisen, as is often the case in these mountains. It had been brooding, but the boys had not noticed it. Already the giant spruces rocked and tossed, far above, as the biting wind whined through their tops. The boys realized their best plan now was to make for the nearest shelter, or they were liable to be overtaken by a blizzard on the mountains, and so lose their way. Swifter and faster

swirled the snow ; it shut them off completely from everything, blinding them and stinging their faces like fine needles. Nothing but vapor and clouds all about, and they were off the main trail. They forged on ahead, climbing bravely up and up, sliding back at each step, but clinging to small spruces to keep from slipping.

“ Do you know where we are, Tom ? ” called Ned, trying to keep up with his larger brother, slipping over rocks, plunging down into deep gullies and over great fallen spruces.

“ Not sure,” called back Tom, above the howling gale. “ We can’t begin to get down the mountain, though, to-night. Look ahead ; it’s almost dark now. I hope we can strike the old mountain house, that is, if it ain’t blown down. We’ll try ; come on.” This old mountain house had originally been built for a cattle shelter, to protect the stock which ranged across the clearings in autumn. A desolate, barn-like structure upon the summit of Cushman which the fierce storms had done their best to demolish.

“ I see it,” called back Tom. “ Look ! It’s right ahead—a big black thing ; it’s the mountain house all right. Brace up ; we *got* to get inside. We’re in luck to strike even this crazy

old place." The old house, black and forlorn, stood there, its windows gone; through its empty casements the winds howled and whined. The flooring of loose planks flapped and tipped, as the boys stepped inside. There was a rude loft, some timbers thrown across beams where hay had been stored; against one side stood a rickety ladder.

"Wish we could start a fire; I'm blame near froze," spoke Ned.

"No matches, bub, and no fireplace in this old shebang, anyhow," replied Tom, regretfully. "Tell you what: perhaps we can find some hay, left up in the loft and make a bunk; it would keep us warmer than staying down here."

They climbed up the ladder, and creeping cautiously over the wabbling beams, upon their hands and knees, they collected enough coarse hay to make a small bunk, selecting the most sheltered corner where the boards were closest. Here, snuggling in the hay, they ate their last doughnut. The place was dark and still inside; as the storm raged and rattled the old building, it seemed as if it would be whirled off the top of the mountain at the very next blast.

"Guess we shan't sleep much up here," commented Ned, dejectedly. "Gee, I'm hungry;

wish we hadn't been such pigs and eaten up our lunch so soon."

"Well, we might as well bunk in and try to get a few naps; though if the storm keeps up, I don't know how we'll get through in the morning," replied Tom. They snuggled down in the hay in their bunk upon the precarious scaffolding, being careful not to move about lest they might fall below, and at last went to sleep. While they slumbered the fierceness of the storm abated, the moon came out, and little twinkly, cold stars shone in through the roof above them.

Suddenly, a swift tap, tapping sound beneath, on the old flooring awoke the boys. What could it be? Then, by the moonlight which shone through the windows, they suddenly spied a young, buck deer which had leaped into the room below and stood panting, head raised, listening, watching.

"Look, Ned! It's a deer," hissed Tom, spying it first. "It's been running; hear it pant. It's *afraid*. See it stand watching for something. Look! look! it's going to jump out that back window. Something's chasing it. Oh, look, look!" As they peered down, a great cat-like figure appeared in the opening of the window, crouching there and glaring inside. It was a

huge, tawny panther. Its wicked looking head was thrust forward, and its eyes shone like living coals. The deer, off and away by this time, had escaped. Then, to the dismay of the boys, the panther sprang lightly down into the room beneath them, and they clung to each other in terror, for the next instant the beast had lifted its great, flat head, giving a baffled yell of rage which shook the old rafters. To their horror, instead of chasing the deer, it began to lope about the old building, snuffing from side to side, finally halting at the foot of the ladder, and gazing up curiously at the two trembling boys, sighting them, as they crouched together on the rickety scaffolding.

"It's a panther, ain't it?" whispered Ned, shakily. "And can't they climb?"

"Yep," replied Tom briefly, fussing over the old gun. "Say, crawl over to the ladder, Ned, and knock it down somehow, can't you, while I load the gun. Quick! Don't be scared. I'll fire before you get there."

"S'pose it climbs up *before* I get there?" hissed Ned, shakily, not liking the job very well.

"It won't—not if you hurry. Go now, now, Ned, quick!" ordered Tom.

Meantime, the panther still crouched at the

foot of the ladder, staring up at the boys with its wicked yellow eyes, evidently making up its mind to climb into the loft. Cautiously Ned began to creep over the logs to the ladder. Oh, if he could only reach it in time! Would Tom never get the gun loaded and fire? What if the beam should slip, and let him down below? Ned lay out flat upon the shaking beam; he succeeded in reaching the top of the ladder, then putting all his strength into his arms, he gave it a swift shove, and it fell below with a crash. Just then, the old gun rang out; the kick which it gave sent Tom sprawling backward into the hay. As Tom hoped, he had shot the beast, the panther gave another yell. Before the smoke cleared Tom missed Ned; at the same time, he heard a faint call. But from where? Where had Ned vanished? Could it be that he had fallen down through the tottling beams, to the floor below *with* the panther?

"Quick, Tom, help, help!" called Ned. "I can't hold on any longer; my wrist's hurt." Then Tom saw what had really happened. Ned had slipped through the timbers and hung down below the loft, clinging to a beam with his hands. If he let go, he would fall to the floor below. So, leaping like a cat over the shaking

beams, Tom had soon pulled Ned up onto the platform.

"Gee, that was a close shave, all right," grunted Tom, quickly reloading the gun, while Ned bade him hurry, for he just knew the panther would jump into the loft. "He don't have to wait for any ladder to climb up here."

Right across a wide streak of moonlight crept the panther, and then Tom, aiming for its gleaming eyes, fired the old gun again.

"Don't miss him this time, Tom," warned Ned, tensely, "or he'll get us."

"Bang!" The trusty gun rang out once more, and the boys distinctly heard the sounds of a wild scuffling down upon the old, loose flooring below.

"Guess I fixed him *then*," said Tom, triumphantly. The panther gave a baffled howl of pain and rage, and deciding that the place was no spot to tarry in, it leaped out of a window and disappeared.

"You hit him! I know you did," declared Ned, admiringly.

"Had to; it was my last shot," replied Tom, wiping his damp forehead with his jacket sleeve. "And say, Ned, I call it we had a narrow escape."

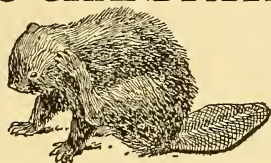
“Think he’ll come back?” asked Ned, rather huskily, nursing his wrist.

“No, not to-night; he’s scared stiff, I think; a good thing, too,” grinned Tom. “See, it’s most daylight; he won’t come back before night, I guess.”

The boys climbed stiffly down from the loft. To their joy, the snow crusts held up, and they soon struck the main trail, reaching camp in time for breakfast. When they returned home, a lumberman was sent with them, for the story of their brave fight with the huge panther had excited much interest in camp and they found themselves heroes.

All the remainder of that winter, the farmers were troubled for the safety of their stock, as soon as they heard there was a panther on the mountain. Strangely enough, it never appeared again in the valley, and some even doubted that the boys had actually seen a full-grown panther. The following spring hunters came across the dead panther in its lair, just above Vulture Cliff. Tom’s last shot had put an end to it—the last panther ever seen on Cushman Range.

HOW AHMEEK
SAVED HIS GRANDFATHER





XVI

HOW AHMEEK SAVED HIS GRANDFATHER

AT last the thick ice which had covered Otter Creek all winter had begun to melt. Already "The Moon of Bright Nights," or the April moon, had shown itself once—a thin, pale sickle, above the snow-capped mountains. Again the sleeping wild, furry things had begun to awaken from their long winter's nap. The muskrats, which lived all along the shallow places of the creek, began to hustle about; full of important business they were, seeking out places between the crumbling ice, swimming down-stream upon errands. Further down the creek lay a very large otter village, and further on, around a bend of the creek, which quite separated them from too inquisitive neighbors, lived a colony of beavers.

All the villages were well planned, because, not far off, the stream narrowed, and here, in early springtime, in a certain gorge, the fish would become so packed on their annual trip to

spawning grounds, that they might readily be caught. Here many of the inhabitants all along the banks would congregate, while the fish were held prisoners, in the gorge, frequently for days. Then it was that the melting snows held many a strange track, all leading to the grand fishing place, for such news travels fast among the kindred of the wild. Here Moween, the little black bear, led her young cubs and taught them to fish properly. Here also came a quaint-faced old racoon and his mate, besides scores of others.

The main entrance to the beaver lodges was well concealed ; it lay beneath the projecting roots of a giant black birch, which had fallen across the creek, lying half submerged, with its roots still clinging to the bank.

Here, held by the beaver's dam, the waters of the creek were black and deep beneath the thick ice. Occasionally, an old otter would venture down to the beaver village ; then there would be a fierce war, and usually the curious otter would go back home, beaten. Ordinarily, the furry ones kept to themselves. Indeed, the beavers were always so busy working, they hardly ever took time for anything else, for if they were busy, they forgot to be quarrelsome.

Deep down in the largest, central room of the

beaver huts, lived Cha-pa, the old grandfather of the tribe, with his mate. The old beavers lived alone, for 'tis the custom of the tribe to set apart the best spare chamber for the older ones. Were not Cha-pa and his wife entitled to the best? For, in addition to being aged, they had traveled wide, had founded many homes, swimming hundreds of long, weary miles in quest of the right spot. Of course, as King and Queen they must have the best.

The beavers had slept through the coldest months of the winter, while the snow had whirled and drifted above them, and the strong ice grew ever thicker, blue as polished steel over the creek, while they remained safe and snug inside their closed-in huts. Occasionally, they would stir about drowsily, gnawing from their ample store of saplings, with their strong, spade-like yellow teeth. Spring was now waking up. Soon the alder and willow buds would burst and swell, the twigs were already yellowing, and they would be very tender eating to the poor, half-starved beavers, for their stored-up saplings were dried out by this time.

The wide, yellow teeth of old Cha-pa, the grandfather, were failing him, but the young beavers, his grandchildren, were kind to him.

It is a pleasant fact that among the beavers, not one will desert or injure an old one, or refuse to care for him when his eyes grow dim and his teeth become too worn to gnaw his food properly. Old Cha-pa was never neglected. It fell to the lot of a certain young beaver named Ahmeek, who was unusually active and lusty, to look after his grandfather, king of the tribe. Before the beavers became fully awakened, a sad thing happened in the chamber of old Cha-pa. His mate, weakened by her long fast, and unable to thrive upon scanty fare, died. I suspect she could not have lived very much longer anyway, for she was very, very old. Still Cha-pa was alert enough. From his distant chamber he could plainly detect the sounds of grinding ice. And he knew the creek ice was breaking up; winter was over—time to get out had come.

Cha-pa always directed the building of dams, and now that his old mate had gone, he also took upon himself her work—the teaching of very young beavers. He showed them the best way to gnaw down a sapling, being careful to tell them they must dive before the sapling fell, or they would be caught beneath. He told them how to make cement which would keep out water. He taught one very important lesson,

that when he slapped the water hard, with his flat tail, they must quickly conceal themselves in the deepest water, for this is a danger signal. He cautioned them that when they dove, they must be very careful not to splash too loudly, lest the watching enemy mark their disappearing and follow them. This, Cheokes the mink, and also sly Nemox, the fisher, would do, for they were as much at home in water as the beaver, and for that reason were greatly feared by them. You can understand what a very important position old Cha-pa held in his tribe. No wonder, then, that young Ahmeek looked well after his comfort.

Cha-pa raised his old, gray, whiskered face from between his stubby, worn-off claws, rubbed his battle-scarred ears drowsily, and peered about the shadowy chamber with his dim old eyes. He was alone, for it is etiquette in beaver circles not to intrude upon the elders unless summoned. Cha-pa felt very lonely without his mate; but soon becoming thoroughly awake, he instantly began to plan work. He heard certain lively, playful squeaks and thumpings against the walls of his chamber. The young beavers were wasting their time in an idle frolic; he would hasten and put them all to

work, for no beaver remains idle for long. The old leader was lame and his bones ached, so that when he began to stir about he was almost tempted to curl up and take another little nap. A noise outside decided him. It was a "slap, slap, slap" out on the creek. Some impudent, forward young beaver had gotten ahead of him, and was already outside.

Cha-pa crawled as well as he could to the entrance of the hut, and peering out between the roots of the home tree, over the door, he was just in time to see a young beaver go sliding gleefully down the muddy bank, turn a complete somersault, land in the water and slap it loudly with his tail. This young beaver chanced to be his grandson, Ahmeek. Cha-pa poked his gray snout out and grumbled at him crossly. This so upset Ahmeek that he instantly set about gnawing off an unusually fine sapling which he hastened to bring as a peace offering to his aged grandfather. This Cha-pa fell to gnawing, gradually forgetting his rheumatism as he tasted the green, tender bark. Then he crawled stiffly down the bank, and just in the edge of some shallow water he groped and dug, clawing out some dark green sprouting leaves, which he began to munch eagerly. Mint leaves,

actually peppermint, which had sprouted. He felt strangely renewed after eating the mint, and immediately went to work. Plunging off into deep water, with a loud slap of his tail, he called all the tribe together, for he found plenty to do. Everybody worked with a will. Their dam had been badly damaged by ice and frost, he discovered, so that it had to be almost entirely rebuilt. The beavers worked at the new dam day and night, and finally it was finished. Then old Cha-pa considered that all the workers might take a sleep for one night, leaving a sentinel out on the dam for the night, to keep watch and call them should anything happen.

But the very night they finished off the dam, and were fast asleep, the God of the Storm was abroad, and scattered discouragement on every hand. For days he walked and whined and groaned, and it rained and rained, and the waters of the creek turned a dreadful yellow, and arose in anger until they had covered over the doors of the beaver huts, as well as entered the homes of the otters and muskrats.

Old Cha-pa called together a hasty counsel. They met in his great chamber, which happened to be safe above the water line. There they sat in a wide circle about him, their claws folded

respectfully over their breast, and listened to his wise advice. Then the old king ordered part of the colony back to work to try and strengthen the dam; others he set to work felling trees and raising the huts above water, lest the young baby beavers drown in their beds. Oh, how they all worked together, night and day without rest! But it was no use whatever, for still the cruel waters continued to rise, flowing over the banks and clear across the meadows. Many of the beavers were caught and drowned by the whirling strength of the water; then, finally, with a crash, down went their beautiful dam, and the yellow freshet swept over all.

Everywhere now was the angry, swirling, yellow water, far as the eye could see, and worst sight of all, many small furry creatures were caught by the awful flood. They floated in between the rotting ice cakes and whirling logs, a sad sight to see. The brave beavers are good swimmers, but the heavy tide of the flood caught them and whirled them along, although they vainly tried to reach the banks of the creek. Just as Ahmeek and his mate and old Cha-pa were almost on the point of giving up and sinking, a great, flat cake of drifting ice came floating

along, and onto this Ahmeek and his mate climbed, and finally succeeded in pulling old Cha-pa up beside them. Then they all three went floating down-stream on the ice floe. Many days they floated, right out in the current of the stream, but finally the ice landed close to a little island, and they hastened, as fast as their cramped feet would allow, to scramble out upon land. Poor old Cha-pa was so weak he could barely crawl, but Ahmeek and his mate kindly helped him up the bank, pushing him in the rear, and encouraging him to crawl up. On the island, to their joy, they discovered many plants already far advanced. Saplings were budding, a bluebird colony had arrived, and already Hukweem, the great loon, was building her nest, and young owls were occupying a tree close by. Then, a little later, others of the beaver family who had escaped the flood landed at the island, and old Cha-pa, encouraged once more, began a new village. The new dam was built, and the water, still and deep, formed a new pond. By this time Cha-pa thought his worst troubles over; he did not know that already new cares were brooding for his poor, hard-working tribe.

In spite of all their pleasant neighbors, so near

at hand, the beavers had one of which they did not dream, and he had a most unpleasant reputation. Upon the side of the island nearest the forest, not far from the creek, lay a great craggy ledge of rocks. Here, in a deep den, which ran under the rocks for a long distance, lived crafty Pekompf, the wildcat. And because the beavers had settled near his lair the crafty one was glad. Lying out upon his home ledge, he would watch them, hard at work. Then his hateful yellow eyes would flash, the tip of his stubby tail would lash itself on the rocks, and he would lap his greedy chops, and bare his long, cruel fangs. Already he seemed to taste young beaver meat. What a feast he would enjoy! He was glad to see so many of them. It would be easy enough to creep upon them without even wetting his mottled fur coat, a thing he dreaded, for no cat likes to wet its fur. Pekompf took to sneaking down from his ledge, each day creeping a little nearer the beavers. One day he actually managed to catch a foolish young thing who would not heed its mother's warning slap on the water. Once Ahmeek himself, who was busy felling a tree, almost became a victim of crafty Pekompf. But Mahug, the loon, gave a warning cry just in time, and Ahmeek plunged right off into

deep water. Finally, the crafty one took to watching poor old Grandfather Cha-pa. He saw plainly how lame and stiff he was; he would be an easy prey.

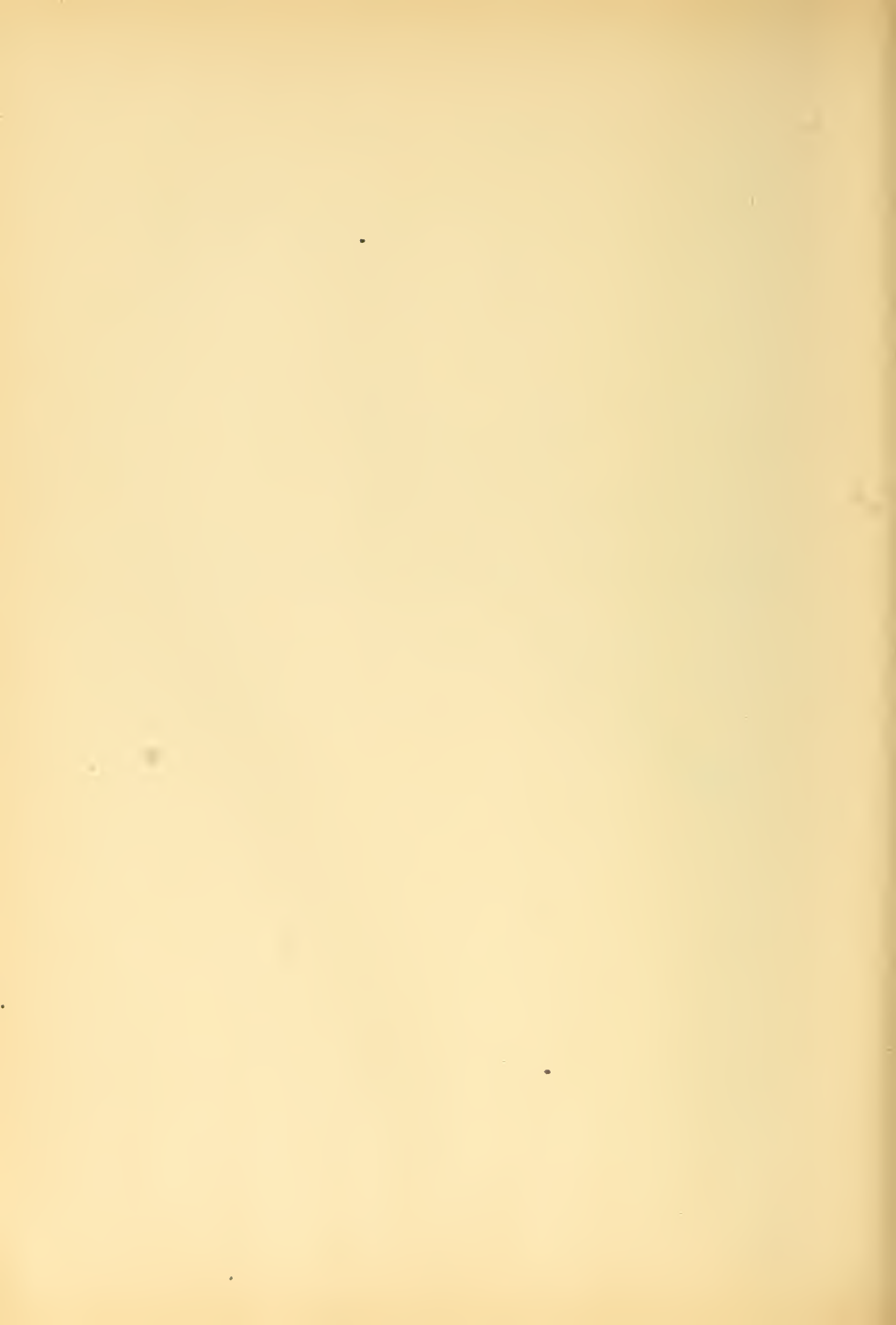
One day Cha-pa came out upon the bank, some distance from the entrance of his hut; here he sat down to sun himself. The warm rays felt pleasant as they warmed through his shabby old coat. All the tribe were at work, and Cha-pa failed to see the yellow, skulking form of his enemy as it came crawling right across the very top log of the dam, slowly but surely drawing nearer the old beaver who sat back toward him. The old beaver began to launder his furry face and comb out his broken whiskers carefully. He rubbed his notched ears gently. Meantime the mottled figure crouched on the top of the dam. Cha-pa saw him not. But there was one who did. Ahmeek, working under water, soon spied him. Instantly he made up his mind to teach the cat a lesson. Diving deep down, he began to gnaw and loosen the *main* log of the dam, the pin log, holding the entire dam. Tugging and pulling worked Ahmeek, the brave. Ah, at last something was doing! Even before the crafty cat knew it, the dam went to pieces with a crash, and he

was under water, dragged down by Ahmeek. Pekompf could easily have gotten the better of him on land—not so in water. He beat, bit and scratched, but the long, strong claws of the beaver held him. Two quick dabs of his claws, straight across the face of the cat, then Ahmeek let him go. And blinded and beaten, the cruel one crawled back to his dark den. Thus was Cha-pa, the grandfather of all the beavers, saved by Ahmeek. Old Cha-pa still lives in the tribe, although his food must all be prepared for him, and he no longer acts as teacher to the young beavers. At the head of the tribe now reigns Ahmeek, who well deserves the honor. All respect and obey him as they once did their old leader, the aged Cha-pa.



REDBRUSH AND
THE THANKSGIVING TURKEYS





XVII

REDBRUSH AND THE THANKSGIVING TURKEYS

WHEN the old mother of Redbrush, the young fox, dug out her burrow high upon the side of a certain loamy hill, she knew exactly why. First, because it happened to be easy digging, but principally because it was not too far away from the farmyard. When her three cubs were half grown, she early found a way of telling them this pleasant fact, and they soon learned their way to the barn-yard and how to follow the scent of prey long distances. Among the three young foxes none showed so much keenness as did Redbrush, the strong male cub.

Did you ever look into a cat's eyes in the dark? Then you may know just how the eyes of Redbrush, the cunning one, looked, in the darkness. Then they became two glowing, golden balls, only that they held in their beautiful amber depths something besides gold—a certain look of sinister craft. By day the

eyes of Redbrush wore quite a different expression. He had a certain cunning, irresistible way of turning his head from side to side, like a puppy. It was then that the eyes of Redbrush deceived one, and were guileless, wondering eyes, holding in their depths just a hint of mischief, but good fellowship for all. Still, if you only knew it, all the crafty slyness of his race was behind this appearance of innocence.

It was November, almost Thanksgiving time. The farmer had, what he considered, the finest flock of turkeys he had ever raised for the holiday market. There were twenty-six of them—beautiful, proud, bronze-feathered birds, and one other, the pride of all the farm, a great, snow-white Tom turkey, who would never be sold, because of his leadership among the flock, besides being a perfect pet.

No wonder then that the farmer was proud of his turkeys, for it had been such trouble to raise them. Everybody knows that a young turkey is just about the most stupid bird, and sometimes the farmer lost a whole flock because the young birds did not know enough to keep from getting their featherless heads wet when young. They would actually stand outside in a perfect downpour of rain, instead of running

for shelter, as the chickens always did. Because of their stupidity they would sicken and die—sometimes the entire flock. Such are the trying habits of turkeys. The poor farmer was often tormented and tried by them, especially when they took a notion to stray off for miles into the woods, and when darkness came, instead of returning home to roost, they would climb up into a near-by tree for the night. Then some one had to be sent out to search for them, and the farmer's boys sometimes tramped many weary miles before the flock could be found.

Thus it happened one particular evening they had strayed off, as usual, and darkness came upon them when they were far from home. Without stopping to think much about it, quite bewildered by the sudden darkness, they merely uttered a few weak, complaining gobbles and then, led by the big, white turkey, they hopped, one after another, up beside him on a rail fence. There they perched, balancing, jostling each other as they settled, and finally huddling together, looking for all the world, with the exception of the great white Tom, like dark bunches of rags, as there they roosted.

When Redbrush, the crafty one, left his burrow that night, he started off alone, making his

way carelessly and jauntily along the trail, padding along like a shadow, so silently you never would dream that a fox had passed by. In and out of the bushes he threaded, finally coming out into a high clearing where he stopped to get his bearings.

The air was keen and frosty, and although the moon was big and pale yellow, it was ringed about with a storm halo. It would snow before long. Redbrush knew this; also he realized that he was fearfully hungry, that his slim red sides were quite hollow. If he did not succeed in finding a good meal before the great snow-storm, he might be forced to fast for days, because when it storms and blizzards howl, few living things in the way of game are astir.

Where could he find a meal? Nothing in the way of small animals appeared to be stirring; they were almost all curled up warm in their winter quarters; they only ventured out when it was sunshiny and warm.

Redbrush came out upon a great, bare rock overhanging the valley, and seating himself, he looked plaintively and wistfully up at the moon, giving a few short, sharp barks of impatience. There seemed to be nothing for him. Oh, but there was! At that moment he saw a small

black and white object stealing out and in among a pile of loose stones ; then it strolled leisurely down the hill. It happened to be Mrs. Whitespot, the skunk. Redbrush did not greatly wish to encounter her for very good reasons of his own ; but he had curiosity enough to follow after her ; perhaps she would find something to eat, enough for them both. Like a shadow Redbrush sneaked after the skunk, which, after scattering a covey of partridges, huddled beneath a balsam, caught one of them, and stole off with it. The flock were now so scattered Redbrush did not succeed in getting one and he was greatly discouraged.

Suddenly, right in the midst of his despair, he chanced to catch a keen scent. It was game, big game, and it was not very far away. Then did the eyes of Redbrush, the cunning one, become sinister. With pointed nose aloft, uttering soft, whimpering whines of anticipation, silently he took the trail. It led him through a strip of dense woods, and there on the other side, in plain sight, huddled together upon a rail fence, perched a great flock of fine, plump turkeys, while in the center, where the moonlight hit his snowy feathers, sat the great, white Tom. Then a terrible tragedy took place.

One after another, all but seven of the turkeys were quickly snatched from their perch, even before they were quite awake, so silently was it all managed. In spite of their flutterings, their little timorous, excited gobbles, Redbrush caught them, silencing them with just a swift snap of his sharp teeth in their slender necks. Then, at his leisure, after some consideration, he dragged them away, burying them in a certain soft, loamy spot. What a treasure-trove had Redbrush! Enough food to last him for weeks, for he meant to keep his luck a secret. He had small cause to worry about his storehouse being disturbed, for among the wild there is a certain code of honor about these things. When one of them hides food for future use, another, going over the trail and discovering it, will seldom meddle with it, because, always, the owner puts his private mark upon his treasure, and should he perchance find it disturbed, leaves it in disdain.

No doubt Redbrush had intended to get all the turkeys, but already dawn was upon him. Besides, by this time some of the dull turkeys had managed to gather their wits sufficiently to get away. Upon their long, stilt-like legs, headed by the white Tom, they charged madly down the steep hill, filling the air with gobbles

of sudden panic and fear, and rushed into the barn-yard just as day broke.

Consternation and dismay prevailed at the farm when only the seven turkeys came home. Wide search was made for the remainder of the flock all day. Redbrush had covered up that dark night's deeds far too well. The farmer knew quite well that a fox had done the work, because he had had previous experiences with foxes; he knew their tricks. He made up his mind to catch this one. He realized that this particular fox must be a very wise one, perhaps a leader, and so extremely cunning that his entire flock of turkeys would be stolen, unless he could catch him.

Of course Redbrush was far too clever to be caught in any ordinary manner. This the farmer realized, and so he set his wits to work and planned a somewhat novel scheme to trap Mr. Redbrush. First, the farmer scattered a few pieces of cheese over the ground; that was all. Redbrush was not long in finding the strong cheese, which he liked. The very next time he visited the spot there was more cheese. The third time he visited the place, in his eagerness to feast upon the cheese on the ground, he completely lost all caution, and failed to scent

the *trap*, casting aside all fear. Boldly he leaped right into the very center of the cheese-covered circle and instantly he was a prisoner.

When the farmer found Redbrush, he felt greatly elated, but the farmer's boy, who loved pets, pleaded so hard to keep the young fox, that instead of putting an end to him at once, as he had intended doing, they took him home. Completely won over was everybody by the cunning ways of Redbrush, the crafty one, who had such an irresistible way of turning his head about, looking so mischievous and winning, one could hardly believe him to be the culprit who had done away with an entire family of turkeys.

They made a sort of wooden cage for Redbrush, but this he disdained to occupy. He repeatedly dug himself out; and, as he could not break his chain, he contented himself by digging a new burrow. Into this he would retire at will, and if you were to investigate its depths, there you would have found many remarkable things, principally chicken bones—bones which had never been thrown in to him, but were the remains of the farmer's fast disappearing flock of young chickens. Oh, but Redbrush was crafty!

At feeding time he would innocently whine and tease for the insipid corn-meal mush.

When a portion was thrown to him, if no one was near, he would proceed to strew it from the mouth of his burrow the length of his chain. Then, quite humbly, he would retire into his burrow, crouching low, only the tips of his tawny ears and his golden, half-shut eyes showing. There he waited the approach of some innocent chicken. Soon the chicken, attracted by the corn-meal mush, would stray that way. Then a swift flash of red from the burrow, and the amazed chicken was never seen again. Of course no one suspected where the chickens went, because how could a fox, well chained, possibly reach the chickens?

Thanksgiving was coming nearer now, and each night, all that were left of the turkey brood roosted near home upon a fence in the barn-yard. The old white gobbler prudently perched higher than all the others, and often tried to urge the rest to follow him; but they were too stupid to trouble about this.

One night, when silence had settled about the farm, everybody being fast asleep, even the old yellow hound, who occupied the woodhouse chamber in winter, there appeared strangers, moving about in the barn-yard. First, two small black-and-white things, which were *not* the barn

cats. They slipped beneath the chicken house. A few muffled peeps and the skunks went off with their feast. Next, around the corner of the barn, stole a slim, red shadow. It took light, graceful bounds over the snow, and after circling around the chicken house aimlessly, and finding no entrance, it made its way to where the foolish turkeys were roosting. It gave a leap, another, then another, and at each leap seized a fat turkey. Finally, all but the old white Tom had become a prey of the red shadow; he had wisely roosted too high. The next hour was spent in dragging off the turkeys and hiding them safely. Just at the approach of dawn, the night's work was finished.

When the first pale streaks of dawn broke, upon a certain bare knoll, there sat none other than Redbrush himself, resting. He had actually freed himself, broken the chain, which each day had been wearing thinner and thinner by his restless movements, all unsuspected by the farmer. To show that he was still unconquered and a fox, he determined to have a great Thanksgiving feast of turkey.

That is why at Thanksgiving time Farmer Brown took no fine fat turkeys to market. He was thankful, however, that Redbrush had the

courtesy to spare the old, white Tom turkey, for that was all that remained for the farmer's own dinner.

Often the yellow hound lies awake nights, listening for the stealthy sound of padded foot-falls. They belong to Redrush as he prowls about the premises. Frequently he hears little, short, sharp barks, afar off; then he knows Redbrush, the cunning one, is off on a trail. Frequently, the yellow dog whines all through the night uttering foolish, futile barks, but no one pays the slightest attention to his warning; they only bid him "keep quiet." But the next morning the farmer always finds fresh fox-tracks in the snow, and if a fowl or two is reported missing he remarks sadly :

"Well, well, that's the smartest, slyest fox I ever heard tell of; if I could only catch him again, I'll warrant he'd not get away."

Redbrush, the cunning one, will never be caught again. He has had his lesson. On moonlight nights you may see him stealing forth on his raids. In and out between the spruce thickets he swings, quite jauntily, full of confidence. Coming out upon the bare knoll, he seats himself right there in the open, and barks and barks at the round, yellow moon.



THE ESCAPE OF
KEEBUKH, THE COASTER

XVIII

THE ESCAPE OF KEEBUCKH, THE COASTER

RIGHT through the very center of the North country run the sluggish waters of Otter Creek. So deep and black are its waters in certain places, that barely a ripple stirs its surface. Down in its murky depths live many fish, pike, pickerel and others, which have lived there so long undisturbed, that they lie motionless, far down in the deepest water. Some are said to be so old they have actually grown moss upon their backs. Only very sharp eyes, peering very far down into the water, when the sun strikes the creek in the right spot, may catch a glimpse of these old fish, great, shadowy forms, as they idly wave a fin to keep themselves afloat. Above, however, there are younger fry, or fish a-plenty; these are livelier and more readily seen. A long time ago, old Keebuckh, King of the Otters, and many of his tribe, who are all noted fishers, came to this very spot where the waters are deep and sluggish. By

peering deep down, his keen eyes detected the great fish in the muddy depths, so that is why the otters located along its banks. When the Indians came, they saw many otter habitations and named the waters Keebuckh Creek, or Otter Creek.

For several reasons, old Keebuckh had selected this spot, first, because of its seclusion and wildness. Great mountains towered on all sides, crowned to the top with spruces, against which the white birches, especially on moonlight nights, gleamed like pale ghosts. Here, where the mountain was steepest, a great, snowy owl, drifting down from far north, built her nest and hatched her wild brood each year. At night, especially at full of the moon, in February, you might hear her lonely call far across the valleys.

“Waugh, waugh, hoo, ho, ho!” she would call, and the lonely mountains would echo the cry over and over again. Then old Mahug, the loon, would call back fiercely as he plunged into the water after a fish, and sometimes another would send out a blood-curdling yell from lower down. This was Peshoo, the cross old lynx, who lived in a ledge upon the mountainside.

But as for Keebuckh, the otter, he was silent enough, and lived in a snug nest which he and

his mate had built of dry rushes, and long grasses, not far from the bank of the creek. Old Keebuckh had investigated this spot well before he finally determined to build there. Lying upon the banks of the sluggish creek for hours he had watched for fish, peering with his sharp eyes searchingly beneath the deep waters, and noting with approval the long, slim shadows, of the great fish which lurked beneath, believing themselves perfectly safe. Keebuckh knew better, and would show all his little sharp teeth in a grin of delight, as he watched the fish, for well he knew how he would angle for them. He had nothing to learn about fishing, and needed neither line, hook nor worm. He would simply sneak, with soft, velvet tread, close to the water where it was deepest, sometimes crawling out upon a half-submerged log. Then, oh, very gently, he would drop the tip of his long tail into the water, and patiently wait for a curious fish to rise and nibble at this novel bait. From time to time old Keebuckh would craftily move his tail a trifle, quite temptingly, and then, the next thing the fish knew, it had been deftly landed by the sharp-clawed otter.

When there was ice upon the creek, Keebuckh would break it and fish through the hole, or

plunge beneath into the water, where he was equally as much at home as on land. After catching his fish, he would bring it out upon the bank and devour it. Of all animals who wear fur coats and live in the great, cold North country, Keebuckh, the otter, perhaps enjoys best the winter months; for him "The Month of Snow Shoes," when the snow is deep, and the ice is thick, is a time of fun and frolic. It is then that his rich, brown fur coat thickens. It really is made up of two different kinds of fur. Close to his skin grows a very thick, soft fur, almost like down, and from this springs an outside coat of long, shining coarse hairs. So you see Keebuckh was warmly clad for winter, and unlike some of the other kindred of the wild, who almost starve in a long, cold season, especially, when the snow is so deep they cannot forage, Keebuckh can always break the ice and fish. His feet are webbed, and his broad, flat tail makes a splendid rubber; besides, his legs, though short, are very powerful, and so jointed that he can turn them about in almost any direction. Fierce and savage, too, is Keebuckh, when another imposes upon his good nature. Then he will bite and fight just as long as he is able. It is said that when an otter is very angry

the Indians fear his bite, for it is full of deadly poison.

Keebuckh and his mate lived upon the banks of the creek happily for many years, before the hunters entered their wild country, and began to trap every otter upon the creek for the sake of their beautiful fur pelts. So also did Peshoo, the old lynx, and the great snowy owl, which lived above in the tall pine, on the side of the mountain. The lynx was a hermit, cross and disagreeable. The owl despised him because of his snarling ways. She often heard him growl and snarl, and hated the sound of his blood-curdling cries in the night, especially, when there were young owlets in the nest. She would often come to the door of her home nest and peer down at old Peshoo with her great golden eyes, sometimes calling to him derisively from her safe place, high above him.

“Waugh, waugh, hoo, ho, ho!” she would call down, hoping to shame him. She never did, for Peshoo would bare his cruel teeth at her angrily and howl back a reply, while with fierce, hungry eyes he would glare up at the great, snowy owl, who had been wise enough to build her nest in such a tall tree, that he dared not climb up and rob her of her children. You

can understand that the owl and lynx were *not* the best of friends.

When winter actually sets in, up north, it is the coldest place you can imagine. Then the snow drifts between the mountain passes and whirls in blinding drifts, for days together. Everything that can, seeks a snug place to crawl into, and they are generally wise enough to sleep there until the storm is over. To stir outside during the fierce blizzard would mean death to most of them. At last the pale sun shines wanly forth; then the things of fur and feathers, which do not actually hibernate begin to stir about, for they usually wake up and discover how very, very hungry they are.

There had been a long, heavy snow-storm; for many days Peshoo, the old hermit lynx, had lain in his den beneath the rocks, asleep. Finally, he realized that the storm whined no longer outside his door, and also he knew that he was dreadfully hungry. In fact, his gray sides were so hollow that his ribs showed plainly; his red eyes gleamed, holding a starved, baffled look, as he poked his snout forth from the rocks, peering sullenly forth over the snow-covered land. He searched with his eyes everywhere to discover something stirring—a rabbit, a par-

tridge, anything, for Peshoo could not remember when he had had his last meal, it was so long ago. A rush of snowy feathers above him, and Peshoo saw the great, snowy owl coming back to her nest with something in her talons. As usual, she had got ahead of him ; he envied her greatly, and just out of spite he raised his snout and howled at her dismally, because of his hunger.

Because Peshoo was of the cat tribe, he hated the snow ; it meant wetting his fur, which he avoided when possible. He realized that game would never come to him, so he determined to lose no time in starting off. Sometimes the lynx makes a very ludicrous figure when he travels, and you would have laughed to see Peshoo start forth, arching his back into a bunch, and gathering all his feet together beneath him, as he began to take long, flying leaps through the snow, looking so comical that even the snowy owl hooted with glee as she watched him go humping himself off over the snow.

As soon as the sun had appeared that day, out came the otters ; they had not minded the awful cold at all, for they loved the snow and thick, steel-blue ice, and had been up and stirring for hours. First of all, they had caught and de-

voured a great meal of fish, and now Keebuckh and his mate were having such fun—a regular frolic—because they were so happy together, and loved the snow. Besides, Keebuckh loved to coast and slide upon snow and ice quite as well as any boy or girl. Otters are natural born coasters, and have been all their lives. Often they will, when traveling over a snowy expanse, stop and lie down upon their stomachs, and slide for the fun of it. As for Keebuckh, he needed no “flexible flyer.” He would scramble to the top of the steep bank near his home, which sloped right down to the icy creek, then, without waiting for anybody to give him a push from behind, would squat down and slide from top to bottom of the bank, out upon the ice. At first, his mate watched him, then, when Keebuckh had made the slide fine and slippery, unable to resist the fun, with a squeak of joy she climbed up the bank and coasted down behind him. For hours they coasted thus; fast and furious grew their fun; it seemed as if they would never weary of it. Soon, other otters along the bank joined them, and the slide was smooth as glass from the passing of their fur-covered bodies. Sometimes they would slide too far, and take a header into the waters of the creek, through the

fishing hole, which they had made in the ice, but they didn't mind that.

Now Peshoo, the lynx, although half starved, and expert enough as a hunter, had not been very successful in his hunting, that day. A fine, fat rabbit had escaped him, even a chipmunk—small fare, which he usually scorned—had managed to slip through his claws, and so Peshoo, just because he began to pity himself, whimpered like a child, from sheer disappointment. Where could he find food? He began to watch for tracks upon the snow. He saw where Red-brush had passed, traveling fleetly, with long, flying leaps. On wandered Peshoo through the spruce bush, in and out, spying a little chain of tracks etched lightly upon the snow. These belonged to a bloodthirsty, old weasel, whom Peshoo did not care to meet, for, although he was larger than the weasel, he feared him. Once a weasel had come to his den, entering it when he and his mate were asleep, and drunk the blood of his mate, after the cruel method of the weasel tribe.

No, Peshoo would not track a weasel. He turned right about, away from the small chain-like track of the weasel, striking in another direction, toward the creek this time. Before he

reached the creek he saw *another* track—a peculiar one. Instantly Peshoo recognized it as that of Keebuckh, because, upon the sole of the foot of the otter, grows a sort of cushion, which leaves a kind of seal or impression in the snow, wherever it walks. Peshoo began to follow the new tracks warily, and before long he came to the creek, where, hiding himself behind a spruce bush, he watched curiously the sight before him—a whole tribe of otters coasting together down the slide which Keebuckh had made for them. One after another they would slide down as fast as they could go. Such fun as they were having! Peshoo could hear their squeaks of delight.

All this time Peshoo was laying plans to outwit the otters, studying, behind his broad, flattened head, how he might trap a fat, young one. Finally his plans were made. By going a long distance around, he might reach the top of the slide, and from there, by crouching behind a convenient bush, he hoped to be able to spring out upon one of the innocent coasters. Peshoo licked his lean chops in anticipation, as he sneaked off.

A sizable group of otters were waiting at the top of the bank. Watching his chance, Peshoo



ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY WOULD SLIDE DOWN AS FAST AS
THEY COULD GO.

finally realized the time to leap had come. He gathered himself for a spring, but just at that moment a sharp bit of snow crust cracked beneath his foot. This the younger otters did not hear. Old Keebuckh, the king of the tribe, had keen ears; he heard the snow crack, moreover, he saw a spruce bough shake mysteriously. Instantly he gave a short, sharp cry; this was an alarm. Without waiting to see for themselves what it all meant, blindly trusting their leader, like a flash, every otter coasted madly down the icy slide, out across the ice-covered creek, disappearing like lightning beneath the water. They were out of sight before Peshoo, the lynx, had fairly gathered himself together for a jump. Once having made ready to leap, Peshoo reached the top of the slide and could not stop himself very well. Peshoo was *not* fond of coasting, so head over heels he went, whirling and snarling and sliding, terrified and dizzy, beating the air with his feet, finally landing upon the hard ice with a terrible whack, right upon his ugly skull.

Across the creek, upon a convenient pine tree, in plain sight, sat his neighbor the great, snowy owl. When she saw the funny appearance which old Peshoo made, sliding down the bank, she fairly chuckled to hear the old hermit's

howls of baffled rage. To show him that she was glad to see the otters make their escape, she called down to Peshoo jeeringly :

“ Waugh, waugh, ho, ho, ho ! ”



HOW MRS. GREEN-FROG SAVED
HER FAMILY

XIX

HOW MRS. GREEN-FROG SAVED HER FAMILY

MRS. GREEN-FROG sat perched comfortably upon a grass tussock, on the banks of the home pond, blinking, blinking her green goggle eyes, and snatching an occasional gnat. The pussy-willows were out, and the bluebirds sang joyously near by. Often Mrs. Green-Frog would scramble hastily to the very edge of the grass tussock and peer anxiously down into the muddy water at her large family; fifty or more children she had, little black polliwogs, who looked like nothing else in the world so much as large-headed black tacks, as they frolicked about merrily in the water.

In spite of Mrs. Green-Frog's somewhat indifferent manner, she had, I'm sure, a real motherly affection for her offspring. Occasionally she would croak a deep, reassuring "ker-chung" to them, and then they would all wriggle about more frantically than before.

Suddenly the bulging eyes of the mother frog became fixed upon a certain suspicious spot far under the bank, and she began to watch the movements of a long shadowy form which darted stealthily through the water. Surely, it was never one of the clumsy turtle family; no, of course not. The next minute she learned just what it was, for, with one insolent swish of its tail and wide open jaws, a sly old pickerel came swimming leisurely down-stream.

This old pickerel was very cruel and crafty, and always hungry. He would swim down the pond, his great yawning mouth, armed with many teeth, clashing together, ready to gobble down anything which happened in his way. Usually whole droves of minnows and the "lucky bug" family darted on ahead, thus giving ample warning of his approach.

Even as Mrs. Green-Frog watched, a whole shoal of hurrying minnows sped past her like arrows; then Mrs. Spotted-Turtle and all her little ones scrambled frantically up out of the water, for, in spite of their thick shells, the old pickerel had a mean way of nipping off legs and tails, in passing.

On came the pickerel, his round goggle eyes glaring horribly, and then, even as Mrs. Green-

Frog watched from the tussock, the old pickerel changed his course, and swimming right into the wriggling polliwog family, with just one wide yawn of his jaws he had swallowed nearly half of them.

Uttering an indignant "kerchung," Mrs. Green-Frog leaped high into the water, and with little croaks she managed to hustle the remainder of the polliwogs beneath a certain mud bank out of sight. Again the old pickerel turned about his long gray body, backing water, fanning with his gills, swimming back over the course; but his jaws closed upon emptiness, so he swam lazily back again to his den among the matted water-weeds.

Fortunately, the little polliwogs had had sense enough to hide themselves in a thick bunch of watercress, and Mrs. Green-Frog was very glad when the old pickerel swam away.

Dearly Mrs. Green-Frog loved her home pond, covered over with great, cool lily pads on which floated white, fragrant lilies, besides the sturdy yellow kind, whose golden cups were perfect traps for quantities of jeweled insects and flies. Soon the little polliwogs reached the tadpole days, and stayed closer to their mother, or began to climb up the stems of pale green rushes. It was then

that their mother commenced to teach them the lessons of the waterways. How to detect the gray shadow of a hawk and spy him out even before he saw them ; how to keep away from the old pickerel. As soon as their little side feet were formed, they would follow their mother's example and vault lightly upon the grass tussocks to safety, croaking in their thin high voices at the enemy as he cocked his impudent goggle eyes longingly up at them from the deep water.

Everything might have gone on very happily with the frogs, had not a most terrific drought visited the frog pond. It had not rained for weeks and weeks, the scorching, summer sun beat down over the land, and the pond was drying up very rapidly.

Soon shoals of silvery minnows and beautiful speckled trout lay gasping, some of them already dead, among the dried-out pebbles at the bottom of the pond. Mrs. Green-Frog realized that she must move her family, and that very soon. Already the grass tussocks stood up high and dry and there was very little moisture to be had, even by grubbing down among the waterweeds ; soon they would all perish.

Out into the dry, wire-like grass they all

hopped, following their mother, for somehow the frog mother knew that far away, somewhere over beyond the distant hills lay a never-failing pond.

Over hot, sun-baked pastures Mrs. Green-Frog led the young frogs; often big black snakes lay right in their paths, while overhead the gray hawks whistled shrilly, following the frog family like evil shadows. Once or twice, in spite of warnings to jump, the gray wings swooped low, and a young frog was quickly snapped up. All day they hopped, the frog family, resting through the extreme heat of the day beneath broad leaves, or in sheltered places, traveling on at night. Would they ever arrive at the pond, and would the kind rain never, never fall again upon their parched backs? On the road they were often joined by other migrating frog colonies. An old bullfrog leader gave them fresh courage; he had scented moisture in the air; surely water was not so very far away. In spite of this encouragement, hundreds of the great frog army died by the wayside. Gasping, the band dozed weakly and miserably all together one day, too scorched and weary to go further. Even Mrs. Green-Frog herself was filled with misery. Then "splash!" something fell upon a

great broad leaf overhead, and instantly every frog in the army was wide awake enough. It had come, the rain, the gentle, soothing rain, just as Mrs. Green-Frog herself always knew it would come some time, for it always does, you know.

“Kerchung, kerchung,” they all croaked happily, letting the cool rain trickle down their parched, wide-open throats. “The rain, the beautiful, moist rain has come.”

“Zoom! Zoom!” bellowed the old bullfrog leader, hoarsely, as the rain pelted his parched, green back, opening his mouth to drink his fill of the warm rain-drops. Suddenly roused into quick action, out into the slanting rain hopped all the frogs together, following their leader. Taking great frantic leaps, almost losing their heads in their excitement, uttering joyous croaks as they hopped, they had scented the pond. At last they came within sight of its welcome banks; then such a scurrying and jostling took place; pell-mell, in they plunged, the big frogs tumbling over the little fellows in their eagerness to touch water first. Then they all dove down into the depths of the pond, into the soft ooze and mud and water-weeds.

That night, when dark rain-clouds hid the

moon, and fresh, moist winds blew among the cat-tails along the edges of the pond, from every grass tussock standing in the marshes, from every lily pad upon the pond, and among the rank skunk cabbages, there arose a mighty concert, beginning with little piping, trilly sounds. "Tr-r-r-r-r, Tr-r-r-r"—ending with a series of "kerchungs" from the middle-sized frogs; then from the center of the bog-lands bellowed out the giant bullfrogs with their bass notes. "Zoom, zoom, zoom," like the deep tones of a bass viol. *Such* a concert as the frogs did give that night, and as the village people paused to listen they said to one another :

"Listen! Just hear the frogs singing; surely they are singing unusually loud to-night. They are prophesying rain. The long, cruel drought is ended; of this you may be sure, when the frogs sing that way; they know it, and are glad."

Of course the frogs knew all about it, and they were just brimming over with happiness and contentment. Best of all, Mrs. Green-Frog herself uttered little happy trills, because she knew her family were saved.





THE ADVENTURE
OF TOMMY SILVERSIDES



XX

THE ADVENTURE OF TOMMY SILVERSIDES

THE winter was long, and all the little wild wood people which lived down deep in snug, warm nests in the trunk of some tree, or under the banks of the brook, were drowsy and inactive. Even the little brook itself had "built it a roof, 'neath which it could hide it, winter-proof." So the brook roof of ice muffled its usual free, joyous bubbling sounds, and they too sounded sleepy and quiet. To be sure, in some places the brook absolutely refused to keep quiet, and dashed itself freely over its pebbles.

The winter had been so bitterly cold for all the little wild, furry things, that the Gray Squirrel family and old Mrs. Muskrat and her small children had actually suffered at times. Especially when the great white blizzards came howling and whirling about them, shutting them up tight in their homes for days, filling their doorways, and burying everything under a blanket of snow. Then it happened, very un-

fortunately, that the food supply began to give out; frequently there would be barely enough to go around, because both squirrel and muskrat families were large and growing, and like healthy boys and girls they needed plenty to eat. To tell the truth, in the squirrel family the children themselves had been much to blame for this.

Patient Mrs. Silversides, the mother squirrel, had tried all the autumn to make the little ones help gather the winter's store of nuts. But you see the fine autumn days were always so pleasant, such hazy, lazy sort of weather; and then the spell of the Indian Summer went to their small heads and the young squirrels just hated work.

So at the season when they might have helped out preparing for the hard winter, instead, they just scampered and romped about all day long with no thought of hungry days coming.

Early and late their parents toiled, carrying nuts from a hickory tree, far off in a distant pasture, back to their storehouse in the home tree. It was slow, tedious work, because all they could possibly carry in one trip were just three nuts, one in each side of their cheeks, and another right between their sharp front teeth.

So long and hard did the old squirrels labor that at last their sleek, silver sides began to grow lean, and fairly hung in wrinkles, while their eyes sometimes looked strained and anxious, fairly seeming to bulge from their heads.

Winter was just about half over and in spite of the patient efforts of the parent squirrels the supply of nuts was nearly gone; they would last but a week or so longer, even if they ate very sparingly. True, down below the last layer of nuts, Mrs. Silversides remembered storing a few maple keys, but everybody knows there is really very little nourishment to be found in the tiny kernel of a maple key.

Sometimes, when the winter had been an open one, the squirrels were able to find certain roots which did very well in place of nuts. If the roots were frozen in, then they would dig away the light snow and occasionally find some of last year's nuts under the brown, dead leaves. But not this winter, because everything was frozen down hard and tight. The few nuts which the squirrels dug out from beneath the snow were mildewed, black, and rancid.

In the muskrat family the situation was almost as bad. To be sure, their food was of a somewhat different nature, yet there was not

much to be found, because the frost line was very deep that winter. So the Silversides family often heard angry chatterings, and choruses of complaining squeaks from a hole in the bank just beneath the roots of the white birch, where the muskrats lived. What were they all to do? It would be weeks and weeks before the warm spring days came, and still snow and ice covered everything with its cold mantle. Oh, if only a warm thaw would come! In that case, then they might hope to find a few early succulent buds, dried berries or wild cherry pits.

Patiently did their old mother gather about her the little hungry, complaining squirrels in their warm dry leaf-lined nest. She tried hard to still their impatient whimperings and chatterings, and in her own squirrel way told about the beautiful springtime already on its way. Then once again their beautiful hackmatack home tree would push out fresh, tender plumes, and the dear woods, now barren and bleak, would be filled with blossoming things; food would be everywhere. She even promised them little excursions to a certain fascinating spot called "The Falls," far above the brook, a spot which the young squirrels had never seen.

The very thought of all this caused the Silver-

sides family to "ch-r-r-r, ch-r-r-r" excitedly together, almost forgetting their keen hunger and the whining of the blizzard just outside their door.

Things began to grow more serious still for the Silversides, and soon there came a time when the old squirrels were obliged to take longer and wider journeys into strange forests far away, searching for food. Sometimes, indeed, they would not return until the shadows, blue and cold, fell in the woods, and the sun had set; even then, although spent and weary, they only brought back a few oil-soaked, rancid nuts.

When the little squirrels were left alone, they would lie quite contentedly, tucked warmly down in the leaves, as their mother wished them to do. Once, however, their hunger became so keen that they grew impatient when their parents failed to return. Out into the frosty air they thrust their inquisitive pink noses, and finally ended by all coming boldly outside. There they sat chattering and complaining upon a limb of the hackmatack tree. The winds were cold and biting and in a near-by sycamore tree a moaning, ominous sound came to them every time the wind swept over it, sending the few great brown leaves which clung to its mottled limbs clashing

together. It made a weird noise, which so filled the small, timorous squirrels with panic, they went scampering back into the nest again.

One day when the squirrels had been alone a long time, Tommy Silversides, the largest of the three squirrels, made up his mind to go off on his own account to hunt for food. Tommy had an exquisite fur coat which was not too loose for him because of leanness. This is the reason : Tommy, the greedy one, had a way of looking out for his own needs, often grabbing the choicest morsels, and bolting them, when the old squirrels turned their heads. He ran boldly from limb to limb and was soon scratching his way to the bank of the brook, leaving his terrified brothers peeking down at him over a limb, scolding and begging him to return.

Tommy paid no heed to them ; instead, he took little flying leaps down to the brook, then creeping out upon the ice, he drank his fill of the clear water and felt very much stronger and bolder than before.

He saw with delight that a few of the "lucky bug" family had thawed out and were darting about upon a black patch of water. Surely, if *they* had thawed out, then Tommy felt certain springtime would soon be there. He began to

take little skipping exercises, whisking his plummy tail quite impudently, wheeling madly about, "chr-r-r-ring" to himself and wishing greatly for company. Just then who should come along but Billy Muskrat, one of the muskrat children with whom he was upon neighborly terms. Billy Muskrat was a bold, fearless fellow, and Mother Squirrel often begged her youngsters not to be too familiar with him, because the muskrat children were said to be very disobedient and reckless.

Of course Tommy Silversides was far too excited to remember about this, so he hurried to join Billy Muskrat, who jumped about upon the ice, which clattered exactly like jingling glass, wherever his little black feet broke through. The muskrat did not mind if the ice did break through and give him a wetting, for he was just as much at home in the water as upon dry land, and could remain under a long, long time, only needing to come up occasionally for air.

"Dear me," began Tommy Silversides in the wood language, which all the wild understand quite well. "How I do wish spring would hurry up and get here. How do you manage to find things to eat in this bitter winter weather?"

“Oh, easily enough,” replied the muskrat jauntily; “just look and see how sleek and fat I am. I don’t have to bother my parents to work and slave for me, hunting food all day, because I just go out and find it for myself,” he bragged. “Besides, my old mother has rheumatism and father muskrat was caught in a trap, we think. At any rate, we haven’t seen him for many months. I think you squirrels are tied to your mother’s apron strings far too much. Why don’t you go about freely as I do? My, but you’re a sad coward, I’m afraid,” he remarked disdainfully.

All this kind of bold talk was quite new to Tommy Silversides. He had never been called a coward before; surely his companion was both brave and wise to hunt for himself and not trouble his old mother. Tommy asked him next about “The Falls.” Did he know of any such spot?

“He, he, ho, ho!” squeaked the muskrat derisively. “I just have to laugh, to think you’ve never visited the wonderful falls. I go there every day quite alone. I have such fun swimming about, jumping off a log into the water again and again. Oh, the music of the falls is pleasant, I can tell you.”

“And is there a beautiful beechnut tree close by?” questioned Tommy, eagerly.

“Well, I should say there was; and jolly full of nuts it is too, so sweet and milky, especially when they’re young and green. The husks are quirly and fluty, and when you strip them off, why, there are the fine, milky kernels.”

Just then old Mrs. Muskrat stuck her gray whiskered snout forth from the bank and called crossly for Billy to come home. To the surprise of Tommy Silversides, instead of obeying her, he turned his head back saucily over one furry shoulder and chattering loudly to his mother, scurried off in an opposite direction as fast as he could go.

It was bitterly cold, and growing more so every minute. The thought of the beechnuts, however, which the muskrat had told about, was entirely too much for poor, half-starved Tommy Silversides, so he made up his mind he would find the nuts. When he came out from the shelter of the thick pine woods, the sharp, keen winds struck him, ruffling his gray fur, and nipping his tender pink flesh beneath it. He hurried on all the faster trying to keep warm. Finally far ahead he imagined he heard

the rushing, musical roar of the falls. On he scampered, filled with fresh courage.

At last, very weary he almost made up his mind to turn back home, when the very next moment, at a sudden turn of the brook he came right out to the wonderful falls.

He found the log which the muskrat told of, and finally came to the beechnut tree. Up and down its brown trunk he ran, searching everywhere for the green, milky nuts. Only brown, rattling, empty husks could he find. No nuts were left. Completely discouraged at this, he just lay out flat upon a branch, panting and resting. As he lay thus, he heard the sound of quick scampering feet upon the log below. It was none other than Billy Muskrat himself, busy over some object just beyond the log, scratching and digging eagerly.

Ah, thought the squirrel, Billy Muskrat has found something good to eat. Suddenly the muskrat gave a shrill squeak of such terror and pain that Tommy Silversides was quite frightened. Then the muskrat lay quite still; he had been caught in a trap. The squirrel had heard the warning of terror which the muskrat had sounded, and without waiting he bolted away as fast as he could run.

Twilight had come when Tommy Silversides arrived at the hackmatack tree, and without a chatter of explanation to anybody, he slid right down into the nest, cuddling close to the other Silversides.

Soon the happy spring days came ; the pussy willows again put forth their gray, furry sprouts, and the bluebirds arrived from the South. Once more the beechnuts unfurled their curly green husks ; then there was food in plenty for all the wood people. How the Silversides family romped and played all day long, chasing each other up and down the trunk of their hackmatack tree, the happiest family in the deep woods.





SPECKLY OF THE WATERWAYS



XXI

SPECKLY OF THE WATERWAYS

THERE were four in the trout family. Father and Mother Trout, little Speckly and his brother Spot, and they all began life together in a certain little mountain brook, far up in spruce-land. Mountain brooks are by far the most fascinating streams in the world ; they are not the calm, still sort, but just bubbly and dancing all along the way.

The trout dearly loved the home pool, which lay just beneath a foamy little waterfall, and as the two young trout grew older and stronger, they often frolicked and played together beneath the foamy falls, trying a sort of leaping game, to see if they were able to jump out of the pool into the falls above. One memorable day, through long practice, they were really able to do this, and found themselves in quite a new spot, full of unexplored, shadowy places, overhung with dark pines, which dipped low their fragrant tips into the clear water. All along-shore were great rocks covered with gray and

red lichens, and cushioned with deep, green, velvety moss.

In high glee, Speckly and Spot darted about the new pool, leaping high out of the water, playing tag with one another. At last Speckly became weary of the new pool, and thought he would go home. Leaping high, flirting a silvery shower of water drops, back he dived right over the waterfall again.

Spot, who loved adventure, was only too content to remain behind. He swam about, rubbing his nose inquisitively against each unfamiliar stone, fanning the water with his red gills, resolving that it would be a long time before he returned to the home pool again, the novelty of the new place so charmed him. Besides, the place simply teemed with insects. Over in one corner, at the foot of some strange, brown water-weeds, he spied a whole drove of little, hard-shelled water-bugs, while here and there darted many a water-spider. Then there were lily roots. At the base of these, down in the oozy mud, he knew well enough there would be pink earthworms for the taking. Although it was early spring, once he saw a blue dragon-fly dip its lacy wings in the pool ; already it was finding young gnats.

The water was very cold and clear, for the thin March ice had barely left it; in fact, very early in the morning before sunup, all about the edges of the brook long, lance-like shoots of thin white ice pushed out from the banks, only to be melted away when the sun came out. So Spot deserted his family and remained in the upper pool. He soon discovered that he had neighbors near by, and made the acquaintance of an old brown water-rat which used to peer at him rather curiously from between the tangled roots of a tree close to the water. Back, quite beneath the bank, lived a giant and very disagreeable pickerel. He would glide across the pool like a shadow, opening and shutting his cruel jaws, armed with many sharp teeth, devouring whole shoals of little minnows at one bite. Spot soon learned to dodge the pickerel and take care of himself.

Finally the ice films left the banks, and all about in the air insect life began to stir, while back in the thickets of brown ferns and underbrush certain dwellers of the fur tribes were waking up from their winter sleep. Besides, there were other things stirring about in the woods, of whom Spot and other dwellers along the waterways knew nothing.

Idly paddling about near the surface of the pool, keeping himself afloat and dozing, but with wide-open eyes in the water, which the sun warmed comfortably, lay Spot. Out of one eye he watched for stray insects. A colony of gossamer-winged gnats hovered over the water in a most tantalizing fashion; up and down, up and down, they danced, just out of his reach.

Once Spot leaped at them, only to fall back into the water with a splash. He never dreamed that his every movement was now being studied by a pair of human eyes. Gliding close to a mossy log, fanning with his pink gills slowly, Spot was almost tempted for a moment to leap the waterfall and visit the home pool again. He heard a strange movement near by, which sounded exactly like his neighbor, the brown water-rat, when he slapped his tail upon the water. The trout sidled out from the bank a trifle. No, neither the water-rat nor even the yellow-spotted turtle were to be seen.

"Swish, swish," sounded something close by. Of course it was just the silken flight of some bird's wing; he had often heard the sound before. The next moment Spot's eyes fairly goggled in his head; they had fixed themselves greedily upon a strange, fascinating insect which

had settled right in the middle of the pool. He must be quick, or the old pickerel would pounce upon it first. Like a dart he propelled himself through the water, beneath the spot where the wonderful insect floated so tantalizingly. Such a gorgeous, remarkable gnat it appeared to be; its head of bright red, its wings a shadowy blue. The trout stared and stared at it with bulging, expectant eyes. The insect gave a dart, as if making ready for flight. Hesitating no longer, the trout rose, gave a swift snap, and the next moment was being deftly played upon a hook by the skilful fisherman who had been angling for him very patiently a long, long while.

Of course the remainder of the trout family never knew what happened to Spot, and in a few days they had forgotten all about him. For with the return of the beautiful spring days the brook's banks were simply crowded with wonderful happenings. In the edges of the waterways, where the brook was shallow and muddy, now frolicked whole colonies of little black polliwogs. Already half-grown tadpoles were climbing the tall green rushes, and the marshes were simply alive with "peepers," which shrilled their early spring songs. Over

among the raised tussocks of the swamp, occasionally sounded a deep "zoom, zoom," which plainly showed that now the giant, grandfather frogs were waking up. The yellow-spotted turtle and her numerous family had left their warm mud bed, and when the sun came out you might see them warming their spotted shells upon a near-by log.

With the approach of warmer days, the trout family began their annual travels, for sometimes the little mountain streams run shallow, or dry up wholly, and it is their custom to seek deeper water during the summer months. Speckly was now almost full-grown, and a very independent young trout. He soon left his parents to mate with a young trout of his own age. Life was vastly more exciting for him now, down in the mill-pond, where he had decided to spend the summer. Speckly missed the fun of leaping the waterfall, but then, he soon learned to love the loud rushing sound of the mighty water, as it tore madly over the great dam. The place was far more roomy, with many secret spots where one might hide when danger threatened. On the other hand, there were strangers in the mill-pond of whom he was afraid. Great, brown water-snakes that cut through the water like

whips, whole colonies of water-rats and a mink. They played in the water upon moonlight nights, swimming across, leaving long, silvery wakes, squeaking playfully to one another, as they chased in and out of secret passageways underground, which led from hut to hut. Now all this happy, peaceful life might have gone on forever, I suspect, but it didn't, because a terrible calamity came to the waterways, which changed everything.

Far back upon the side of a mountain, perhaps a hundred miles away, the first trouble started. It began with the breaking up and melting of a giant snow-drift, which had lasted into late spring. Then the rain took a hand, and thus the terrible freshet was started. Gradually it grew and spread, forming new, strange currents, until you never would have recognized the little brook. Finally, as the torrent increased, it came to the mill-dam; there it gathered fresh strength, and one night it tore right through, sweeping dam and all ahead of it, spreading itself out upon the meadow like a wide lake.

Now the freshet had taken everybody by surprise; even the old brown water-rat was not prepared; usually he knew all about such

things, and would often move his hut prudently higher, away from the water line. But who ever dreamed that the great dam would be swept away? The water-rats, in company with other furry things which had been caught by the water, managed to reach a friendly log, to which they clung until the flood swept past them. At last, slowly, the waters began to recede, and little stray islands began to poke up through the water. Then in every hollow spot you might see the trapped and drowned ones, the dwellers along the waterways. High and dry were left the trout family. The old fish were nearly dead, but Speckly, though very uncomfortable, was still alive. Oh, if he only could manage to reach the water again! In desperation he began to thrash and flop about. Soon the hot sun would come out; then he would be done for. Besides, already the swift wings of scavengers along the waterways were following the trail of the flood. Flocks of crows screamed jubilantly as they viewed the waiting feast below them; the long-legged herons, and cruel gray hawks were already fishing greedily.

As Speckly lay there gasping weakly, suddenly the grasses were pushed aside and his old neighbor, the brown water-rat, poked his head

cautiously out. He had lost his mate in the freshet and was seeking her everywhere. First his nose appeared, somewhat battered it was too, then two bright beady eyes, then his whole body crept forth. His hair lay flat and mud-caked against his sides, and he was very weary and terrified. Seeing the way clear, he took courage, began to comb out his tangled whiskers, and tried to launder his mud-caked fur coat. Just then a strangely familiar, beguiling squeak came from a half-submerged tussock, and with his toilet half finished, the water-rat dove hastily off into the water. The sound of splashing water, near at hand, filled the stranded trout with fresh hope. He managed to flop a trifle nearer the stream, a tiny thread, all that remained of the brook. A terrifying shadow suddenly hovered overhead, and a shrill whistle of triumph sounded. The gray hawk was after him.

Speckly decided quickly to outwit him. Remembering his old leaping game of the waterfall, he gave several mighty leaps. Again and again he leaped. The shadow was lowering. One more brave leap, and Speckly, the trout, had entered the water and hidden himself beneath a stone. He was quite safe at last.

The mill-dam has never been rebuilt, for long

ago they ceased to grind corn with its old-fashioned stones. If you go there some day, you may be able to see Speckly for yourself. Beautiful beyond words is this beautiful brook trout. His body shades gradually from a faint pink to pearly white below. His gills are bright red, while across his back and sides, are scattered eighteen, fascinating black and red dots. Because of this clear description I am sure you will recognize Speckly of the waterways, the largest, handsomest trout now living in the old mill-pond.



XXII

THE TAMING OF BOB WHITE

STRANGE as it may appear, young Bob White had *two* mothers. The first little mother quail built her nest in the edge of the deep woods upon the ground, in a clump of tall, fragrant ferns. The brave father quail, after the eggs came, took his turn at hatching out the brood. The nesting place appeared safe enough, being hidden by such tall ferns that you never would have expected to find a whole nest full of quail eggs there. Of course, while the mother quail was busy with the eggs, she had not noticed that Hawahak, the great brown hawk, had built her nest that same season in the crotch of a certain tall pine in the edge of the forest. Often, she would peer curiously down, with her keen golden eyes, watching the innocent quail family at their home-making.

One day, after the young hawks were hatched, their parents went sailing far and wide, hunting food for them. Impatiently they searched,

sending down their shrill screams, hunting everywhere. Finally, the sharp eyes of Hawahak alighted upon the round, plump back of the little mother quail, away down in her nest among the tall ferns. A swerve of the barred wings, one low, silent swoop, and only the nest, full of snowy eggs, was left; the little brooding mother quail was gone; the nest was unprotected and alone.

Thus did small Bob White lose his *real* mother, and he never would have had another, only, by good luck, another pair of eyes had been watching the hawk, and knew of the little tragedy which had taken place. The farmer's boy, followed by his yellow dog, pushed his way through the tall ferns and the dog soon scented out the quail's nest.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the boy. "What a find! A nest chock full of quail's eggs." And the yellow dog, taking all the credit to himself for discovering them, leaped and barked frantically about the nest. The eggs were still warm, for the little mother quail's feathers had covered them but a few moments before.

"That mean, old hawk," commented the boy; "he's gone off with the mother quail, just as he comes to my young chickens and steals

'em." Then the boy decided to take the eggs, because, as he reasoned, "some old weasel or black snake, or the old snapping turtle I saw back in the woods, will find them if I don't." So he gathered the eggs carefully, and placing them in the crown of his old straw hat, took them home. Now, as it chanced, "Old Speckly," his pet hen, desired to set, and so persistent had she been about it, that many times the boy, who had not wished her to, had tried to make her forget all about it. But it was no use, for when Speckly made up her mind to do anything, she usually did; even dipping her head first into the rain barrel had not changed her determination to set. She was so cross and ugly at being disturbed, that she would ruffle up her feathers and utter the ugliest, hoarsest noises. The boy concluded now, that old Speckly should have the quail eggs to hatch out—that is, if she hadn't changed her mind about setting. She had not. And when the boy went to find her, he had a long search before he discovered where she had hidden herself; finally, he spied her away under the barn, calmly sitting upon one perfectly good egg and another, of imitation china. In spite of her anger, her sharp pecks at his hands, and the nipping away of a bit of flesh, the boy pulled

the indignant Speckly from her place. After making a nice nest for her of clean straw, he put the fifteen quail eggs and the one hen's egg into the new nest. To his great joy, Mrs. Speckly, as soon as she saw a whole nest full of eggs before her, calmly and with deep clucks of contentment and triumph settled herself upon the nest, gently tucking each egg carefully out of sight beneath her soft feathers.

As it happened, some of the quail eggs had become chilled too greatly, so they did not hatch out, and old Speckly raised only one chicken and three little quail. Her disposition was so happy, that she was as much pleased over the small brood of four, as she might have been over sixteen. She certainly proved herself to be a faithful mother, and worried much over the little quail, who were so tiny that she easily lost sight of them among the tall grass. At such times she would rush frantically about, searching everywhere for them and calling. She never wearied of scratching out grubs and dainties for them, which they, from the first, seemed to prefer, instead of the insipid chicken mush which the chicks enjoyed.

When it was time to leave the small coop, and go back with the larger fowls to roost at night,

old Speckly was still anxious about her four chicks. She would go into the roost and call and urge the three little quail to mount up beside her on the high perch. This the young chicken of the brood would do, but from the first, the others, who had been strangely unlike him, would never do; they always preferred to roost low upon the ground. In the first place, old Speckly noticed that the little quails' legs had not lengthened as had the larger chick's; perhaps they could not climb as well. She would climb clumsily to the perch each night, and her awkward, long-legged son would perch beside her, often crowding her so rudely, that she frequently had to give him a sharp peck on his head to teach him manners. Then, "Cluck, cluck, cluck" she would call, peering down over the perch at the other three, which had followed her into the house. Sometimes, in her anxiety for their safety, she would even venture to climb down heavily from her perch, upsetting the important red rooster and his family, who would set up angry squawks of protest. With all her clucking, the little quails never followed her; they would call back softly to her, little reassuring "Peep, peep, peep's" from the dusky shadows below, content to huddle together in a

bunch and sleep upon the floor. It happened that an old gray rat was busy gnawing his way from the granary into the hen-house. Sometimes the old red rooster and the hens would hear the rasp, rasp, rasping of his sharp teeth in the night, and taking sudden alarm would cackle and flutter and fall off their perches, making such a disturbance. In spite of alert hearing, they were all asleep the night the old rat finally *did* gnaw through the last board into the coop. Old Speckly discovered, the next morning, that she had left, but two of her brood : the long-legged chick, and one little quail ; the old gray rat had carried off the other two. He did not come back another night for little Bob White ; luckily the farmer's boy caught the old rat and so put an end to his mischief.

That season Bob White wintered with the fowls, and watched his foster-brother, Red Top, as the farmer's boy had named him, grow into an impudent young rooster. Such long, bony yellow legs as he had, and he appeared so ungainly when he ran. Besides, Red Top developed such a hateful disposition ; he loved to frighten and bully those smaller and younger than himself, and was always jealous of little Bob White, for some reason—perhaps, because

old Speckly showed him too much attention. Sometimes he would sight another, smaller chicken from across the yard, especially at feeding time; then he would lunge across upon his long, stilt-like legs, and placing himself directly in front of his adversary, would look him squarely in the eye and dare him to fight. If food was thrown to the fowls, Red Top would always manage, because of his long legs, to scramble in ahead of the little ones, and gobble up such a quantity of grain, without even pausing to swallow, that even after all was gathered, he would stand quite uncomfortably about, vainly trying to swallow that which he had bolted far too quickly, because of his greediness. No wonder then, that he got the very best of all the pickings of the yard; and as for poor little Bob White—he had to take what he could find.

Bob White refused from the first, to fight with Red Top, bully of the yard. Nothing seemed to delight the impudent fellow more than to chase and hustle Bob about, pecking at him and worrying the little quail, often nipping out feathers. Sometimes the watchful eye of old Speckly herself saw him; then she would chase him about and peck at him sharply, for his impudence. Taking it altogether the life of little

Bob White was not so very happy. He craved the wild, open life, which he should have been living in his natural haunts, for it is said one never can wholly tame or domesticate a quail.

Early in the spring there came a change, for Bob White was now a full grown bird. Of course, he never would have long legs like his foster-brother, Red Top, but oh, he was far, far handsomer, and each day saw him gaining in courage. By this time Bob White's feathers were thick, and of a glossy, cinnamon brown upon his back, barred off with white. His little, sleek head was crested with darker brown; over his eyes ran a line of pure white, while his neck was of a dazzling snowiness, marked sharply with a wonderful black crescent. His breast feathers were all sprinkled over with little marks like arrow-heads, and his eyes were of a melting bronze hue. It was a great day in the yard, the first time little Bob White found his voice and used it, surprising even himself. First, he sounded the alarm cry of the quail.

"Chut, chut, chut," he called sharply, and the cry was so strange, that the stupid fowls, never suspecting that Bob White had found his voice, all cocked their eyes skyward to see what strange kind of a hawk might be sailing over

the yard. Even before they had gotten over their first surprise, the quail called again.

“Chut, chut, chut;” then: “Bob white! bob white! bob-bob-white!” he called plaintively. The startled fowls stared, astonished, to see old Speckly’s strange chick mounted upon the roof of the coop, his little crested head raised proudly, as he called and called, “Bob white! bob white!” again and again. Old Speckly herself clucked anxiously for him to fly down to her, but little Bob White flirted his short, barred wings at them all and was off and away, for somewhere, beyond the purple hills, he had caught a faint Bob White call, and had flown to find his kindred.

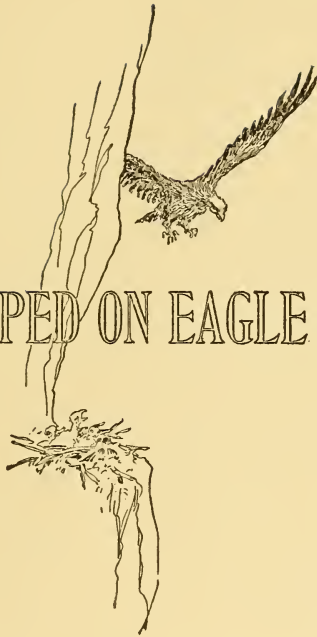
At first, the little lonely quail, partially domesticated, had a hard time, and missed the companionship of the fowls, for it seemed strangely lonely off in the great woods with no friends about him. Still, he enjoyed the wonderful deep, secluded places where he nested alone at night, for always he had hated the closed-in coop, with the fowls. Besides, now he could forage for himself, and had not to share everything with Red Top, the greedy. He loved the small, sweet berries, and the little, nutty seeds in the edges of the woods. Soon he grew very plump and glossy, but search and call as

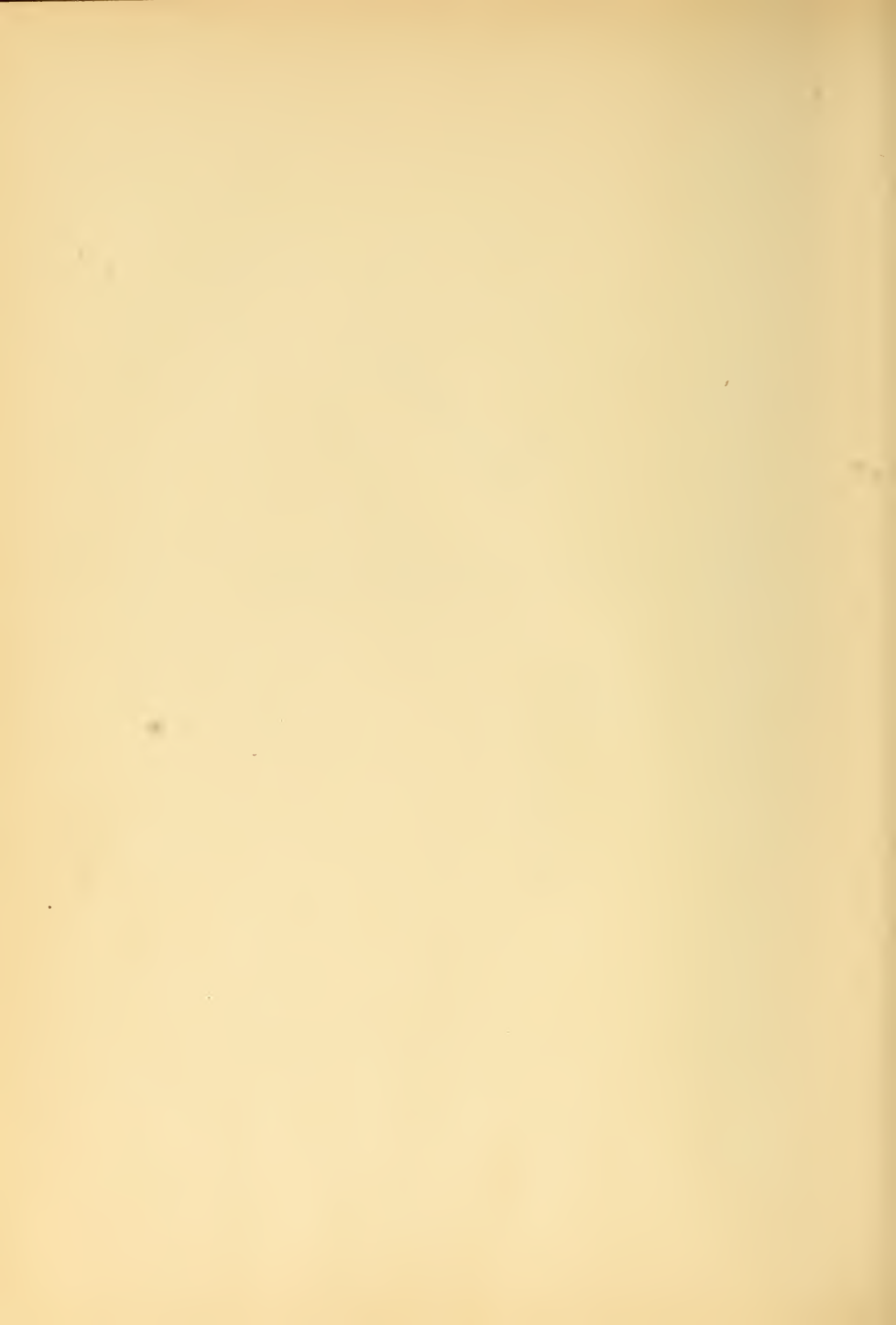
he might, he could never seem to find any of his tribe. In time, he learned to look out for the perils which lurked about in the forest, and one day, when he had flown to a convenient log, to break open a hawberry, suddenly, in front of him, appeared a swaying, jet black head, and he found himself looking into a pair of evil, beady eyes, and caught the flicker of a sharp forked red tongue. All this, as little Bob White looked, began to make him strangely dizzy, and he felt himself giving up to the thing before him. Suddenly the black snake tightened its coils, and in an instant would have seized Bob White. The snake raised its ugly head still higher, hissing sharply, when, as the little quail forgot everything, a strange thing happened. *Some one else* had been watching the snake; a whirl of great, barred wings, and a large hawk swept down and snatched the snake in its strong, sharp talons. Bob White did not stop to see if the snake got free, but went whirring swiftly away, uttering his sharp alarm, "Chut, chut, chut," as he flew.

At last, when the fall days began to lengthen, and the berries turned red in the hedges, Bob White managed to join a covey of his kindred. They did not migrate far south when the other

birds went, but sought instead, a sheltered cove by the sea. Here, when the warm, sunny days come, one may see them beneath some sheltering bower of coarse beach grass, taking their dust bath, huddling closely and affectionately together when the winds blow keen and strong. When the snows begin to drift, the covey will find a retreat back farther, in the dense cedar thickets, where clusters of purple cedar berries grow, fragrant and plentiful. In the spring, when the bluebirds and swallows come back, down in the salt marshes, where the great pink marshmallows blossom, and the cat-tails and rushes grow, you may catch a glimpse of our little quail, whom old Speckly could never tame, as he calls across the meadows: "Chut, chut, chut! Bob white, bob-bob-white!"

TRAPPED ON EAGLE LEDGE





XXIII

TRAPPED ON EAGLE LEDGE

"I'D like to be a Scout and go into camp with the boys this summer," spoke Fred Benton wistfully, as he and his friends tinkered over an old boat down by the river ; " but I guess I can't—not this season anyhow," he added dejectedly.

" Well, why can't you, I'd like to know? I think it's mean," broke in another boy in a disappointed tone, for they had all been talking over the proposed trip to the Adirondack woods.

" Couldn't afford to get a suit, first place, and the ticket costs lots too ; no, I just can't go along," sighed Fred. " My folks ain't rich like most of the other boys' are, and besides father has been out of work a month. I have to give mother all my *Saturday Evening Post* money now, to help out."

" Well, anyhow, it's a shame you can't go ; of course we fellows wouldn't have teased you to go if we'd known," spoke Rob Marks, pityingly. " We thought you made lots of money selling

Posts and doing errands ; we are always allowed to keep all we earn."

The boys dropped the matter, and went to work with a will, bailing out the old boat. They had found the old punt half-submerged in the water, and as no one put in a claim for it, they dragged it ashore, planned to repaint and own it together. It would do very well to go crabbing with and to fish in, just off-shore.

"I've got a dandy name for our boat," announced Rob ; "let's call her 'The Scout' ; we'll paint it on her, in big red letters."

"Good work," seconded Ted. Afterward the boys spent much time down by the river with their boat. All the other boys came there to swim on hot days. Besides, the fishing was good and there were plenty of crabs—big, blue fellows, that nipped bare toes sometimes. Then, over beyond, about two miles across the river, towered the Palisades, one of the wonders of nature—a range of mountains fifteen miles long, their summits perfectly level and flat, rising like great, massive carved towers out of the water. In spite of village industries upon one side of the broad Hudson, the Palisade side still remained unsettled, in places a perfect wilderness.

"Look, look!" shouted Rob ; "there's an

eagle over there! See," pointing, "it's right over against the Palisades now. They've made their nest over on that steep ledge there every summer; it's called Eagle Ledge now; and it's an awful wild place. See, there he goes!"

"Ain't it a big sea-gull or a hawk, Rob?" suggested Ted, screening his eyes to sight the bird.

"Gull nothing," interrupted Rob, impatiently; "it's an eagle all right, and a mighty big one too."

"It is; Rob's right. It's an eagle," affirmed Ted, eagerly. "It's a baldhead too. See! He's chasing a gull now, fighting with him and trying to take away a fish." And the boys watched the battle of the eagle and gull with much interest.

"Say, fellows, I got an idea," broke in Ted excitedly. "Why couldn't we go across and hunt up the eagle's nest?"

"Huh! If there were young eagles over there in the nest, the old birds wouldn't do a thing to you, I guess," remarked his brother idly, as he stuck to his job of stopping leaky places in the old boat.

"Yes, but it'd pay to get a few scratches, wouldn't it, if you could get a live young eagle?"

persisted Ted. "I read in the paper that they want eagles down to Bronx Park; they lost the only specimen of a baldhead they had in the park, this winter. The park people would pay good money for a live eagle, a young one."

"Oh, never mind about your old eagles now," grumbled Rob; "let's launch *The Scout*; she don't leak so very much now, and we can paint in her name to-morrow. Say, can't we just have packs of fun with her? We can't go across in her though, I guess, but she didn't cost us a cent, and when we go off this summer to camp, Fred can use her. Say, I certainly wish you *were* going with the crowd. Most all the boys in our class are Scouts now."

"Well, I can't, that's all," replied Fred. "And say, fellows, good-bye! I'm off after my papers; it's late," and Fred was soon out of sight.

That night he came home late, tired out, and as usual, handed his paper money to his mother. After supper he was so tired he went straight to bed. Somehow he couldn't sleep, however, for down in the village that evening he had run across a crowd of the boys, all talking over the coming outing, and admiring a display of Scouts' suits—everything a boy could possibly want for

a camping trip. That night Fred tossed about and dreamed. Between his dreams there came to him a wonderful plan, showing him just the way he might earn a large sum of money. He would cross the Hudson, find the eagle's nest, and then, if there were young birds in the nest, as he suspected, he determined to capture them and sell them to the park. He must not tell a soul of his plan, for even now some crafty, experienced hunter, having read that the park eagle was dead, might be planning to capture the eagles on Eagle Ledge. But how could he ever manage to go across without hiring a boat? Why, of course—*The Scout*; he hadn't thought of the old boat.

Some one would have to go along to bail her out, she leaked so badly. Instantly he thought of Mollie, his little sister. She would be game for any sort of a lark—good as a boy, and even better, because she could keep secrets. He resolved to wait until Saturday, starting at daylight, before any of the boys came down to the river; then no one would see them get off. Besides, that would be the best time probably to visit the nest, because the old eagles would be off after food the first thing in the morning.

During the week Fred told Mollie his plans,

and between them they arranged everything. Early Saturday morning they slipped quietly away from the house and down to the river even before the thick mists had lifted from its waters. Fred brought along his mother's clothes-line, and a good-sized gunny sack to put the young eagles in, should there be young in the nest, and he was lucky enough to get them.

Soon they were in the boat, with Fred pulling manfully at the oars. The leaky old craft was somewhat hard to manage, and soon Mollie had all she could do to bail the water out, for as soon as they struck heavy water, and the tide, *The Scout* began to leak worse. The tide was running very swiftly as they reached the center of the great river, and now Fred had hard work keeping the boat headed in the right direction. His arms ached fearfully, but he dared not stop pulling a second, for fear of being caught in the swift currents and wrecked.

"Right over there we better land," directed Fred. "I've been watching the eagles for a week, and think their nest is just about half-way up that cliff." Slowly but surely, they drew nearer and nearer the shore, and finally the pinkish, purple-shadowed walls of the great

Palisades loomed through the mists right above them.

“Look, sis, the eagles are right up there, that awful high place. I can almost see their nest now; it's on kind of a little, narrow shelf; that dark spot away up high—see it?” and Fred pointed it out to his sister.

They both saw the place plainly, and even as they watched a great eagle spread its wide wings and circled out over the water. Fred pulled in the old boat, and the spot where they landed seemed a very desolate place, a fitting haunt for eagles or almost any wild thing.

They found a rough trail, running slant-wise, toward the top of the mountain, and started out for its flat summit. Only from the top might the eagle's nest be reached. As soon as they reached it, by lying down flat, and leaning far over the edge of the cliff, which fell straight down fully five hundred feet to the water, they could command a view of what lay below them.

Here and there against the smooth face of the cliffs grew a few stunted shrubs which clung to the bare rocks, but no trees. About midway of the cliff they spied Eagle Ledge, covered with what appeared to be an untidy litter of drift-wood and sticks—it was the eagle's nest.

“Look! Look, sis! it’s the nest! There it is!” exclaimed Fred, excitedly. “Don’t even stir. See, there’s one old eagle now. My, ain’t he just huge? He’s got a fish! See it glisten! There’s sure to be young eaglets in the nest down there. Look! He’s bringing the fish right to the nest; he’s feeding them.” Sure enough, the children could plainly hear, from their hiding-place upon the cliff, the clamorous noise of young eaglets as they were being fed. Meantime, Fred began to busy himself with his rope. Doubling it, he tied one end to a very tough sapling, and found it would be just about long enough to reach the nest below.

“Guess I’ll take a club along when I go down, in case I have to fight off the old eagles,” said Fred. “I can stick it into my belt, tie the bag around my waist, then my hands’ll be free to slide down the rope. I can shin up again easy enough. Got my ‘sneaks’ on; they’ll help.”

Mollie was afraid to have him go, but Fred reassured her, making light of the adventure. They waited quite a while for the old eagle to leave its nest, and finally it sailed away; but not until it was a mere speck in the sky did Fred finally launch himself out over the edge of the cliff.

“ Oh, oh, Fred, I’m afraid, I’m afraid,” wailed Mollie. “ What if the rope breaks, Fred? Oh, do hang on tight,” she called down, lying flat and watching her brother as he swung dizzily out away from the cliff.

“ Don’t you worry ; I’m all right,” he called back bravely. “ Only keep quiet ; don’t yell again, or the old birds will hear you and come back before I’m ready for them. I’ll be back in a jiffy. They’re here ; they’re here ! I see ’em—the young eagles,” he called up to her. “ There’s three of ’em. I’ll get ’em, sis.”

Just as Fred had almost gained the nest, he heard a quick, sharp cry of warning from above ; Mollie was calling.

“ Fred, Fred, hurry ! Oh, do hurry ! The old eagle’s coming ; it’s another one ; it’s coming from another direction, back to the ledge,” called down Mollie frantically.

Sure enough, a glance showed Fred that the mate was returning ; every instant its great, wide wings were sweeping nearer and nearer the ledge, and Fred realized, only too well, that he would stand no chance whatever in a hand-to-hand battle with the eagle, on that bare wall-like cliff. Just then his foot touched the edge of the shelving rock where the nest was, but he broke

through the debris, sending a great mass of refuse, twigs and stones down below, and rousing the young eaglets, who set up shrill screams of alarm. The next thing, the motion of Fred's body started the rope whirling.

"Oh, Fred, don't wriggle about so. Can't you stop the rope whirling? It's most worn through; it's going to break. Oh! Oh!" screamed Mollie in an agony of fear.

Back swung Fred against the cliff, and not an instant too soon. He touched the rocks, and somehow managed to dig his fingers into a crevice. Would the rock break away? It held, and very fortunate for Fred that it did, for the next moment the rope had parted, sawn in two by the sharp rocks against which it had rubbed, and the free end went spinning out into space, leaving Fred clinging to the face of the rock. Fortune favored him, for he found himself a few feet away from the eagle's nest, and by crawling very warily, he managed to reach another shelf-like projection from which sprouted a stunted cedar shrub. Lucky for him that the bush served as a partial screen, for just then came a mighty rushing of wings, a hissing sound, and Fred felt the cool air, as the great eagle fanned him, alighting upon its nest. Sick, dizzy, and

trembling in every bone, Fred lay flat upon the ledge, which was just about wide enough for his body; he was quite cut off from above by a projecting rock, so his sister could not see him.

"Oh, Fred, where are you? I can't see you, Fred. Are you down there?" screamed Mollie, thinking her brother had fallen off the ledge.

"All right, Mollie; don't you fret," called up Fred, rather faintly. "Got a dandy little shelf to lie on. But, sis, you'll have to go bring some help to get me out of this scrape. Go bring a strong rope, and hurry, sis."

When Mollie reached the foot of the Palisades, and found the old boat, it was almost half full of water. She bailed it out, working frantically; then picking up the heavy oars, she started to row across the river for help. She strained her eyes up at the cliff, but could not see her brother. What if he had fallen into the water? Perhaps he had fainted. Oh, but she must hurry. Soon her hands were blistered and bleeding; suddenly she began to feel water about her feet; soon it was over her shoe tops; she must bail. So bail she did, but the old tub began to drift off-shore in the heavy current. Mollie began to shout and scream in terror. At last her shrill cries were answered, and a boat

put off from the other side, to her aid. It was Ted and Rob Marks; they had been down to the shore to look for *The Scout*. As soon as Mollie could explain, they hurried back to the boat house for a stout rope; then, accompanied by a man, they rowed toward the Palisades.

When they arrived at the top, Mollie pointed down the cliff to where Fred had disappeared, and they saw something waving far below. Fred had tied the gunny sack to a stick, and was signaling to them. They let down the stout rope from above, calling out to Fred to sit in the loop, and they would draw him up. Out swung the rope over the ledge, and soon Fred was seated in the loop.

"Swing me out over this way toward Eagle Ledge," called up Fred.

The next moment Fred found himself dangling close beside the eagle's nest. There lay the young eaglets, and they were alone, for the old birds had flown off again. Working very quickly, lest the old birds should come back again, Fred opened the bag with his free hands, grabbed one squawking, scrawny eaglet, then another and another, and although they bit and scratched, he soon had them safe in the bag, then signaled to be drawn up.

Three weeks later when the local Boy Scouts started for camp, they marched through the village, headed by the high school band, each Scout wearing his new uniform proudly, and one of the happiest boys of the company was a certain *new* Scout. Can you guess his name?





HOW SILVER BRUSH SAVED
HIS PELT



XXIV

HOW SILVER BRUSH SAVED HIS PELT

DICK HUNTLEY lived in a Canadian lumber camp, where his father was superintendent of the loggers. Necessarily, Dick's schooling had been neglected, because there were no schools up there in the great forests. Dick made up for his lack of book learning by his wonderful knowledge of wood lore. He could tell you the exact spot where the hoot owl built her nest, right in the heart of Balsam Swamp; he knew where a bobcat had her den, and when she had kittens; he could imitate the short, sharp bark of a fox, so that even Red-brush himself was often deceived, and would halt in his tracks to listen.

Oh, there was knowledge a plenty to be found in the woods, if one had a keen sense for Nature and her ways, besides sharp eyes. There were myriads of hidden, wild trails to be explored, there in the beautiful spruce country, where the giant trees almost seem to touch the

blue sky with their sharp, pointed tops. Away down below run the trails, the hidden coverts of the wild, furry tribes, fox, bobcat, lynx, badger, and the dull-witted hedgehog family.

All about the camp it was clear, but back of the slash, or where the timber had been thinned out, were dense forests. Away up on the mountainside in a little clearing, stood the rickety remains of a trapper's hut. Not far from this were traces of a beaver dam, deserted long ago. But all along the mountain stream lived colonies of muskrats, less wary than the beavers. There they had built their mud huts, trustingly, and Dick often watched them.

Higher up in the forest, back of the old trapper's hut, ran a little loamy clearing, where a red fox had made her burrow. It was early spring when Dick, tramping over his favorite preserves, first discovered the home of Mrs. Red-brush; and as fox pelts were valuable, he determined to keep his find a secret; he delighted to visit the spot often, and one day in April he had his reward. Warily creeping nearer and nearer the burrow, being very careful not to break even a twig, and keeping to the windward that they might not scent his presence, he saw a wonderful sight. There were four little fox cubs about

the size of collie pups, and covered with a sort of reddish, woolly fur, playing just outside their burrow, with their mother. They were so cunning, such playful little things, rolling and tumbling over each other in the sunshine, that Dick stayed to watch them a long while. He did so, whenever he came near the burrow.

Usually one of the old foxes remained with them, but as the cubs grew in size, they required more food, and unable to forage for themselves, both the old ones would go off for food. At first they brought back to the burrow young, tender fare: field-mice, a partridge or young muskrat, or an occasional bird. Dick never wearied watching the little foxes worry and growl and maul over their game, tussling together like kittens over it, always ending up good-naturedly in a regular frolic, tossing feathers into the air, and playing with a blue jay's wing for hours. But in spite of all their fun making, they still remained, by nature, foxes; for they were always on the alert, ever ready to scent danger or the presence of an enemy. Well enough Mrs. Red-brush knew how to warn them. Dick soon learned that she gave a new and peculiar cry when she wished to signal danger. This cry was not the usual short, sharp bark of the fox,

but a regular alarm cry which sounded like "Yur, yur, yur-yap!" Whenever the cubs heard this warning cry, even if their mother gave it while off some distance in the forest, no matter how hard they might be playing together, instantly the cubs were alert, would cease their fun, and huddle close together in the burrow for safety. After a little practice, Dick managed to imitate this alarm cry of the old fox. So well did he succeed, that often, just for sport, while watching the cubs from his hiding place, he would give the call, to watch the little foxes hustle inside the burrow.

For many reasons Dick decided to keep the fox burrow a secret, one being, that over on the edge of the lumber camp there lived a half breed boy, Joe. This boy had all the natural craftiness of his Indian ancestors, and made a good business of trapping, in season, selling many pelts to traders.

If Dick himself had at first thought of trapping his family of foxes for their pelts, he soon gave up that idea, for, to tell the truth, the more he saw of the happy little family of Mrs. Redbrush, the more did he become attached to them, which forbade the killing of his pets for their fur.

By the time fall came, the cubs were half grown foxes, and able to take the trail and forage for themselves, as well as the old ones. In fact, Dick discovered that the old foxes had actually deserted them. At last two of the larger cubs also left the burrow, and roamed off by themselves, or perhaps had been shot in their wandering life. So now there were but two young foxes left, one of them a slim little thing, with a bright red coat, but the other one the strangest looking specimen of a fox Dick had ever seen. In fact he was *queer*, not at all resembling his brothers and sisters, or any fox ever seen in that section. Every time Dick saw him, he seemed to change in appearance.

The weather soon grew keen and frosty; with the bright red coloring of the maple leaves, and the autumnal tintings, came a still greater change in the coat of the queer fox. Larger and lustier he grew in body, becoming nearly twice the size of the little slim red fox. His woolly coat had been replaced by one of deep, dark, glossy fur. Each day, as the weather grew keener and colder, did this wonderful coat darken and deepen, until it was almost a glossy black; while each long, silken hair was tipped off with white, until finally the whole beautiful coat ap-

peared to be actually silvered over with a white frosting, and his wonderful brush, usually carried proudly high, ended in a tuft of snow white fur. Because of this silvery plume of a brush, Dick called him Silver Brush.

Cold days, when the sun shone, Dick often found Silver Brush and his companion just outside their burrow, sunning themselves. Once, in spite of his utmost caution in reaching the secret covert, where he watched them, a twig had snapped sharply, and Silver Brush instantly raised his head, fixing his eyes suspiciously upon Dick's hiding place. Of course the boy expected the foxes to take fright and run inside their burrow, but instead imagine his joy when Silver Brush, spying him, actually stared into his face with his beautiful golden eyes. Dick returned his stare for a full second; he showed no fear of him. To tell the truth, Silver Brush had been aware of Dick's coming and going for some time, and now had no fear of him—he was *trusted*. With bated breath, Dick stared at the beautiful animal; he admired the streak of jet black fur across his eyes, and the thick, glossy black of his neck ruff. When Silver Brush had looked Dick over to his satisfaction, he gave a few short, sharp barks, then he and his little slim red companion,

trotted unconcernedly off through the thick spruces. After that time, Dick often caught a near view of his wild friends. Sometimes Silver Brush would even halt for a second, to stare at him curiously with yellow, inquisitive eyes, never offering to run at sight of him.

The "moon of falling leaves" was over, the season of feasting, when the milky, sweet hazelnuts slip from their yellow husks and are found and crunched by sharp white teeth; then the wild, puckery cherries hang heavy, abundant and scarlet along the fox runs, and over the tops of the reddened blackberry leaves, trail wild grape-vines, full of sugar-sweet luscious grapes, which the keen frost has mellowed almost to bursting. What a season of feasting for all the fur-coated tribes! Soon this passes, the whirring, winged bird colonies have migrated. And then comes down the cold in earnest, with its snow flurries; when the ice in the early morning, films over the mountain brooks, so that the light, fleet-footed wild things break and shatter it like glass, in their passing. Keen and stark grows the cold, up there in the bleak Northern passes, and the lumbermen bank up their shacks with spruce boughs to keep out the cold. Then comes the season of "The Mad Moon," when the wild

things of the forests lose their heads, and run far and wide. In November, the coats of the fur-bearing ones reach their glossiest finish, and full of high spirits, they often leave their old haunts. Dick had not seen his friends for weeks now, and he missed them greatly; he was saddened by the thought that perhaps he might never see them again, for one day, when he had gone to inspect his muskrat snares, Dick found out that some one else shared his secret with him. He met Joe, the half-breed boy, who boastingly accosted him.

“You know what I know, eh?” greeted Joe. “Me, I get one fine pelt. Know why? Think; only but *one pelt* and I am rich. I get him. Silver fox pelt bring much money. I see one last week. I get him bimeby, sure—you wait. You trap the muskrat. Ha, ha! I get one silver fox pelt.”

The boy, Joe, then plunged into the forest and was soon lost to sight, leaving Dick, trap in hand, staring after him in sudden dismay, for, like a flash, as the boy described the fox which he had seen, Dick knew he meant none other than Silver Brush. He was a genuine silver fox; now he knew. Of course Dick knew the great value of the pelt of a silver fox.

Why, a coat such as Silver Brush wore would make him almost rich ; the half-breed boy had not exaggerated. How they would hunt him now, poor fellow ! Dick could not forget the trusting gleam of those golden eyes, or the coaxing, puppy-like turn of his head, that time when they had accepted each other as friends. The idea of hunting Silver Brush for his beautiful pelt now filled him with disgust. Then and there he made up his mind that he would outwit the half-breed boy ; that he should never take the pelt of the silver fox, not if he could prevent it.

From that time on, poor Silver Brush became a marked fox, hunted by many, for the boy, Joe, had not been able to keep his secret. Once, after a long, cold rain, Dick caught a glimpse of the poor fox fleeing from his pursuers. His beautiful brush, usually held proudly high, trailed wet and heavy behind him, and Dick saw him halt at a stream to wash his sore, bleeding feet in running water. Then, as he suddenly caught the scent of the hunters, he ran on and on again. They did not get him that time ; he was far too cunning for them.

Joe, the half-breed boy, had set many crafty traps for the silver fox, and somehow, in spite of

himself, Dick took to watching them. It is against the honor of a trapper to tamper with a trap, or take away another's game, but there was no law against *watching* a trap. So, one day after a light fall of snow, which is the very best time to trap an animal, as the snow completely hides the man scent about a trap, to the snares of Joe came Silver Brush himself. One of the traps had been sprung by a muskrat, and just because Silver Brush had run far, and was hungry, he ate this poor bait. Leaping lightly across the brook, he soon discovered a fine bit of fresh meat, partly covered by snow. He began to make circles around the baited trap, each time drawing a little nearer the bait, suspicious of it, making up his mind to sample it. Then Dick saw him, but the fox failed to spy him. Dick wished to warn the fox, but how? If he shouted suddenly, the fox would very lightly crouch upon the trap, so, halting where he was, Dick kept out of sight, and instead of shouting he gave the alarm cry of the old mother fox.

"Yur, yur, yur, yap," again, "Yur, yur, yur, yap," called Dick. Never had he imitated the cry better. Silver Brush raised his snout to listen. A third time the call came, the old, familiar warning cry, which the young fox had

learned to obey. Then, to Dick's joy, Silver Brush gave a short, sharp bark of recognition. Instinctively fearing that the bait or surroundings meant danger for him, without deigning to touch the bait, the fox leaped high and clear, right over the terrible steel trap, and bounded off, looking like a silver streak as he struck off into the forest, disappearing between the snow-laden spruces. That was the very last time Dick saw Silver Brush.

One trace the fox left behind to show he had visited the traps—a tiny bit of silver tipped fur. That is why the half-breed boy, after visiting his snares, boasts, to this day, that once he found sure proofs that a real silver fox had visited his snares, and had been nearly caught by him. Somehow, he could never understand how, the fox had got away. Dick could have told him, but he never did. As for Silver Brush, he became very, very wary at last, and decidedly weary of always being on the alert, always trying to get away from the hunters and trappers. He left that dangerous location and struck off into a far country, where it was strange and wild. There unmolested and untracked by man, he roams in the deep coverts of the forest in peace, wearing, with just pride, his wonderful silver pelt.

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